



POET AND PLOWMAN

L. K. Chukhist

Leonard K. Elmhirst did History at Cambridge, saw active service during the first world war and having been invalidated out of Mesopotamia, spent a few months in India where he got keenly interested in the problems of agricultural and rural development. While a student of Agriculture at Cornell, he was inspired by Rabindranath Tagore's ideas and ideals of rural reconstruction and came to India in 1922 in response to an invitation from the poet to become the Director of the Department of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan for the first two years. His practical idealism and warm-hearted service helped to build-up a sympathetic and scientific tradition of integrated rural reconstruction work which came to be accepted as the national ideal for community development projects throughout India. He was the founder of Dartington Hall in England and the Life-President of the International Agro-Economic Conference. Leonard Elmhirst served the Governments of India and West Bengal as honorary adviser for agricultural development. He was also a member of the Committee for Rural Higher Education set up by the Government of India. In recognition of his invaluable services to the Visva-Bharati and to India, the Visva-Bharati conferred on him the degree of Desikottama (D. Litt. *honoris causa*) in 1960. He passed away in 1974.

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L. K. Elmhirst

POET AND PLOWMAN

LEONARD K. ELMHIRST



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FOREWORD

Rabindranath Tagore was fortunate in his many foreign friends, English, European and American. Some of them came to be closely associated with his now famous experimental centres of education and rural reconstruction at Santiniketan and Sriniketan. The memory of Charlie Andrews, Willie Pearson and Sylvain Levy, each with his unique contribution, are now part of the history of Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati. In the same way, and indeed more basically and vividly, the contribution of Leonard Elmhirst is an integral part of the history of Sriniketan. One can hardly think of Sriniketan without recalling the debt it owes to Elmhirst's dynamic zeal, devotion and initiative. He did the spade work (literally, too) and helped Rabindranath lay the foundation of a complex of activities, seemingly rustic and lowly but in the long run vital for national regeneration.

For Rabindranath, the two experiments, pedagogic and agricultural, cultural and rural, were vitally linked. The very difference in their setting made the link more vital. What he tried to work out, at Santiniketan and at Surul, was an integrated programme in which culture of the mind and culture of the soil went hand in hand. That Santiniketan should grow as a cultural oasis in the midst of an arid waste of decaying humanity had never seemed right to him. How to build a living and fruitful network of communication between the two had long troubled him.

In early 1921 when the Poet was in New York he learnt of Leonard Elmhirst, a young Englishman, son of a Yorkshire Curate, who having done History at Cambridge was then learning Agriculture at Cornell. Having been invalided out of Mesopotamia during the first world war, Elmhirst had spent some months in India where he had got keenly interested in the problem of agricultural and rural development. Here was a young idealist with the right passion and the right scientific training which Tagore needed. He sent him a telegram to meet him in New York and promptly invited him to join him in India and help launch his experiment at Surul. The young man agreed, and a few months later, in November of the same year, duly

arrived at Bolpur, true to his word.

This book contains almost day-to-day diary of what Elmhirst saw, felt and did at Santiniketan and Surul during the next nine months. Informal, candid and uninhibited, these daily jottings are an authentic and therefore invaluable record of a period crucial to the growth of Sriniketan and of significant interest for the early history of Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan. Far from dull or merely matter-of-fact, it is a fascinating human document, as interesting and as revealing in its way as the Diary of Elmhirst's ancient and more famous countryman Samuel Pepys, also of Cambridge.

Though primarily concerned with farming, Elmhirst had too lively and versatile a mind not to be interested in what was happening around, whether at Santiniketan or Surul or in the nearby villages, and too observant an eye to miss anything. What he saw and heard he jotted down the same day or as soon as possible, simply and truthfully, without sentiment, bias or exaggeration of any kind. A gallery of memorable portraits, roughly sketched but with a discerning eye and a skilled pen—poet Tagore, his eldest brother the philosopher 'Borodada', their gifted nephews, the artist brothers Gaganendranath and Abanindranath, Charlie Andrews, Willie Pearson, Prof. and Madame Sylvain Levy, Kalimohan Ghosh and Gourgopal Ghosh, and many other ancient contemporaries—flit across these pages in authentic glimpses.

To his English sense of humour, Elmhirst had added the Indian ear for gossip. He seemed to have enjoyed listening to whatever he heard or overheard and duly jotted it down. And so he tells us how the ladies of the Tagore family were concocting plans for his matrimony, thinking it a great pity that such an eligible young bachelor should go to waste. He noted down what the Poet's nephew, the irrepressible and irreverent Dwipendranath said to him of Gandhiji who, it seems, had 'accused' him that 'my indigestion was most certainly due to my secret sin, though in reality it had arisen from drinking milk.' Dwipendranath had therefore heard with no little interest that the Mahatma was now suffering from an attack of dysentery.

'I have,' he assured Elmhirst, 'sent a message to Gandhiji asking him to search his conscience deeply in order to discover his own secret sin. Probably it is nothing more than that goat's milk which Gandhiji is always drinking.'

Some of the observations recorded in the Diary should be of interest to students of Indian sociology. When Elmhirst visited the village of Bhuvandanga, a Brahmin landlord wanted to know how to cure his potatoes of disease and how to grow them larger in size. 'When we suggested a night school for the village, he said it would be most unwise. The villagers might come to know too much and would be much less easy to handle.' Noticing two scarecrows in one of the fields, he found to his surprise that there were human skulls on top of each. When asked why, he was told : 'To frighten thieves away. By the use of skulls these plots became haunted and no one will dare to visit them between dusk and dawn.'

It goes without saying that the most significant entries in the Diary are those which relate how the foundations were laid, brick by brick, almost from scratch, of what later became famous as Sriniketan. These entries based on first-hand knowledge are an authentic testimony to Rabindranath's passionate concern with the imperative need of resuscitating the dying agricultural and village economy of his land. It is a pity that this very real concern of his has somehow failed to receive due appreciation from his people. Is it because it was overshadowed, partly by his own glamour as a poet and partly by Mahatma Gandhi's mystic cult of the charkha ?

Rabindranath's active concern with this problem was prior to the Mahatma's, dating from the nineties of the last century when he had first come face to face with the grim tragedy of the village economy while looking after his family estates in north-east Bengal. Though he lacked the Mahatma's singular power of dramatising every issue into a national crusade, his practical approach to the actual problem was both more realistic and more comprehensive. He believed in the intelligent application of scientific technique as necessary for the development of Indian agriculture and of small-scale rural industries. This

belief, rather than the magic of charkha, has been amply vindicated by what has happened in many parts of India today. On the other hand, he shared the Mahatma's gospel of self-help and his faith in the dignity of manual labour, however seemingly low. Indeed, had the Mahatma watched Elmhirst and his boys carrying latrine buckets to empty them into manure pits, he would have hugged them with delight.

Though the Poet did not himself handle the plough, except symbolically as in the beautiful wall-fresco by Nandalal Bose, and left it to Elmhirst and his team to break the clod and upturn the soil, he was in spirit a true Plowman. Hence the appropriateness of the book's title, vaguely suggestive of William Langland's fourteenth century allegory.

Elmhirst did not stay long enough to direct and participate personally in the later development of Sriniketan but he continued to take an active and lively interest in its progress which was greatly helped by the very generous financial assistance that Dorothy Straight, who later became Mrs Elmhirst, provided over a long period of years. To this day Elmhirst has not ceased to watch lovingly from a distance the expanding career of this wayward and colourful offspring of the Indian Poet and the English Plowman.

The call of love and the call of his native land took Elmhirst away to England where Dorothy and he made their home at Dartington Hall in Devonshire, an ancient and picturesque estate dating from the IX century. Here they built up a remarkable centre where experiments in farming, rural industry, education and the arts are carried on simultaneously. The ideal of integrated living in harmony with nature which Rabindranath sought to work out at Santiniketan and Sriniketan is being worked out there too, albeit in a setting and under conditions so vastly different that there is hardly any perceptible resemblance or kinship on the surface. But the creative spirit and the fervour which went into their making are not dissimilar. At Dartington, as at Santi-Sri -niketan, the Poet and the Plowman have worked hand in hand.

KRISHNA KRIPALANI

INTRODUCTION

Early in 1921 while Gurudeva was in America, some American friends told him of a young Englishman from Cambridge, who was then studying Agriculture and doing part-time teaching at Cornell University. He was further told that this young man, Mr Leonard Elmhirst, was anxious to come to India to study its village problems at first hand. The Poet was delighted and wanted immediately to meet the young man. Mr Elmhirst, who was already full of admiration for Tagore and his Santiniketan promptly responded to the Poet's invitation. The two met at New York. The Poet was greatly impressed by the young man's sincerity, his enthusiasm and above all, his sane outlook. The Poet said, he had an institution at Santiniketan which was mainly academic, but it was surrounded by villages which were decaying and dying. He wanted somebody to come and help him to find out why. Would Mr Elmhirst be prepared to go and live in a village? The young man readily agreed.

Mr Elmhirst arrived at Santiniketan in November 1921. The Poet asked him to go and see for himself the state of things in the villages. He placed at his disposal a few young men whom, the Poet said, he might train up as workers in village reconstruction. This, in brief, is the genesis of the Rural Reconstruction Department at Sriniketan. Elmhirst's initial difficulties were, indeed, very great. He had to fight against numerous obstacles in the shape of ignorance, lethargy, suspicion and social inhibitions of various kinds all of which he overcame with love and sympathy, patience and hard work. He went to the very root of the problem in so far as he attempted to break down the age-old social walls and infuse in the villagers a feeling of mutual respect and self-help. His devotion to work was an inspiration to the villagers as well as to the young band of workers for whom to work with Leonard had all the thrill of a big adventure.

Mr Elmhirst is the chief architect of Sriniketan which he built up with his own labour and later gave financial stability to

the project with funds from his own resources. The work he had started was not simply an isolated undertaking ; it was a sort of movement full of possibilities and has now taken the shape of community development undertaken by the Government of India. During the two years Mr Elmhirst was at Sriniketan he had kept a diary making day to day entries of his varied experience, which he is now bringing out in the form of a book. It is a most interesting document and will be of immense help to all those who are interested in the work of village uplift. Mr Elmhirst has done me a signal honour by asking me to write an Introduction to his book. This I do with great pleasure and also with a feeling of gratitude for all that Mr Elmhirst did for Santiniketan and Sriniketan.

SURENDRANATH KAR

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

It was in New York in November 1920 that I first met Tagore. By the end of our short interview I had made my first miscalculation. I discovered later that in the Poet's mind I had created quite a false impression. A day earlier I had received in Ithaca, and at breakfast, quite out of the blue, a cryptic telegram : 'Come and see me in New York. Rabindranath Tagore'. I was in the middle of my second year of study at the New York State College of Agriculture on the campus of Cornell University. When the first world war was over, and I had achieved demobilisation in the late summer of 1919, I had gone there to study for a degree in agricultural science. I was, after a term as kitchen boy in a student restaurant, earning my board and lodging by teaching English to first year students of both sexes. My dearest ambition was to get back to India and to work there in some Indian village, preferably for Rabindranath Tagore. But I had no clear idea how this ambition might ever be achieved or how I would be able ever to find direct access to a man of such international distinction, and possessed of such a profound mind and of such poetic insight. The dramatic effect upon me of reading *Gitanjali* just before I set sail for India in 1915 had never receded from my mind.

I left Ithaca the same night for New York. Shown into Tagore's room, I was still puzzled as to how he had ever heard of my existence. I had to wait another thirty years before I discovered from Sam Higinbottom the real truth. Nor did I know then how for the past thirty years Tagore had, himself, been looking for someone who would be ready to live in an Indian village in order to try and find solutions for some of the problems he put to me that morning.

Around December 1890 his father had sent him, then twenty-nine years of age, to live on and to manage the Tagore family properties in East Bengal. There he had made two important discoveries : first, that the villagers seemed to have lost all ability to help themselves ; secondly, that both research and technical assistance would be needed if they were ever to learn how to

rescue themselves from their creeping decay. Tagore did not tell me in New York of all the many experiments he had himself tried in the hope of finding workable solutions. Someone, unknown to me,—I realised, must have put my name before him as that of a man already interested in the idea of living and studying in an Indian village.

‘Mr Elmhirst’, he started, ‘I have established an educational enterprise in India which is almost wholly academic. It is situated well out in the countryside of West Bengal at Santiniketan. We are surrounded by villages, Hindu, Muslim, Santali. Except that we employ a number of these village folk for various menial tasks in my school, we have no intimate contact with them at all inside their own communities. For some reason these villages appear to be in a state of steady decline. In fact they are all in decay. Some years ago I bought from the Sinha family a farm just outside the village of Surul, a little over a mile from my school. I hear that you might be interested in going to live and work on such a farm in order to find out more clearly the causes of this decay.’

Graduates of Cambridge, from which University I already had a degree in history, were mostly inhibited in those days from ever showing, or expressing, enthusiasm about anything. They were in fact expert at diminishing in public their most profound desires by a somewhat nonchalant manner. To make use of any enthusiastic superlative was simply ‘not done’. I must have said to Tagore that I was not entirely uninterested in such a proposal. ‘Would you like to sail with me to India tomorrow?’ ‘No’! ‘If I can stay and finish this my final year of study at Cornell I should be much more useful to you than if I left my present courses in the middle of them’. ‘Have you ever been to China?’ ‘No! It is an ambition of mine to go there one day’. ‘Is it? I hope to go there myself one day. Will you be sure and let me know as soon as you have finished at Cornell?’ ‘Yes’! ‘In September?’ ‘Certainly’.

Tagore was, I was told later, left with a vague impression that my main interest in life was really to travel and that most of all I hoped to visit China. His proposal that I should actually

go and live and work among villagers in India, under his own wing and eye, was for me the fulfilment of a dream that had been planted in my mind as far back as November 1915 by a Mr Swamidoss from South India at a student conference in Lucknow. Later, from first-hand experience at Santiniketan, I discovered how often in the early stages of meeting some new acquaintance the poetic imagination was liable to catch at a straw and build around it some quite unrealistic image, later on, in the light of stark reality, to be corrected, sometimes with groans, sometimes with laughter.

It was July 1921 when, knowing that all my courses at Cornell were to finish in the coming September, I wrote to Tagore to ask if he still felt he needed me at Santiniketan. I mentioned nothing at all of plans that I had already formulated, of the special courses studied in the hope that some of them might be of direct use to India, and nothing about the funds that I had already been promised towards this enterprise, or of purchases of books and equipment already made.

On my arrival back home in Yorkshire, where my latest plan was being looked at by the family with critical disfavour, a cable arrived from India in answer to my letter of July to Tagore. 'No funds available. Don't come. Andrews.' I mentioned nothing of my quandary to the family but hurried across the Pennines to Manchester to see Willie Pearson, then a teacher on Tagore's staff at Santiniketan and at home on leave. With his backing I cabled from Manchester : 'Funds available. Can I come ?'. 'There's a nice cable just come from your Mr Tagore', said my mother, running out to meet me. 'What does he say ?' I asked. She read it out : 'Delighted come. Rabindranath Tagore'. 'How much is he paying you ?' asked my father. 'Nothing', I said.

On my arrival at Santiniketan the following November I was invited by Tagore to sit under a mango tree and was given a short briefing. For the first few weeks afterwards I saw him only occasionally. He had instructed his son Rathi, Santosh Majumdar, who was almost like his own son, and two members of his staff, Kalimohan Ghosh, and Gour Gopal Ghosh, to sit

with me and to draw up detailed plans which together we could show him as soon as they were ready. Tagore seemed to be in a desperate hurry. During this time I started taking Bengali lessons from 'Boroma' as and when I could fit them in.

Early in January 1922 Tagore called me into his room and said : 'The ten of our college students, who say they want to become farmers, are impatient to start work. They and the members of your staff are all Bengalis and all know English. I can't wait any longer. How soon can you all take up your residence on the farm at Surul ? Stop your Bengali lessons. If you learn too much Bengali yourself you'll want to go on your own to the village to ask them your questions. You will then make the great mistake of trying to become indispensable to this enterprise like any foreign missionary. I want you never to go alone to any village but always to take with you either a student or a member of your staff to act as interpreter. Only in this way will they learn what kind of questions you ask and just how the farmers and villagers frame their answers. These answers they will then have to interpret back to you. In this way they will never forget the experience.'

On February 17th 1922 we all set out for Surul together on our Ford lorry with our pots, pans and tools. For some weeks I only saw Tagore very occasionally. I knew that both staff and students called on him regularly when they visited their friends at Santiniketan for they used to report back to me his reaction to their novel experiences. Gradually I began to sense something of his own growing interest, and of his sense of urgency. On March 31st 1922 he wrote me from Shelida, Nadia, having heard of our students success in entrenching rubbish and night soil in their own back gardens :

Please take it seriously when I say that my whole heart is with you in the great work you have started. I wish I were young enough to be able to join you and perform the meanest work that can be done in your place, thus getting rid of that filmy web of respectability that shuts me off from intimate touch with Mother Dust. It is something

unclean like prudery itself to have a sweeper to serve that deity who is in charge of the primal cradle of life. I wonder if you fully realise how great is your mission and what a future it has before it. But the small beginning which you have made of this institution at a remote corner of the world carries in it a truth for which men today are groping in bewilderment.

It became increasingly clear that his support and interest went far deeper than I had ever dared to suspect. As I cycled in the spring heat past the door of his thatched mud house (in those days there were no buildings to the north of the road that still runs from the Santiniketan Post Office west to Surul until the Santal village), Tagore would hail me, ask for the news, and invite me to share some recent gift of mangoes or Bengali sweetmeats 'since Sir Charles' as he called Andrews, 'won't risk them.'

As the number and range of our problems increased, Rathi, his son, or Santosh Majumdar or Kalimohan Ghosh, my three most intimate collaborators, would consult him and I would then be brought into the discussion. My determination to stick to Surul and the job in hand only served to whet his appetite for more regular news of the latest developments. As the months went by I found him ever more eager to come and visit the farm or to find time to discuss the new puzzles as they arose. Politics and political discussions were everywhere in the air. Tagore was being accused, not by Gandhi, but in the Press and by the politicians-in-a-hurry, of being out of touch with the basic mood of India, of being too much of a poet and of a detached educator, of having his head in the international clouds and of not being a thorough-going non-cooperator. His senior students and many of his staff at the Ashram were unable to make out just where I stood either in relation to India's national aspirations or to Gandhi's developing programme of refusal to cooperate with an Imperial Government. Yet I was obviously working with and under Tagore's direction, was plainly sympathetic with Indian national aspirations, and was already becoming increas-

ingly conversant with the problems of the local villages and of their people's needs.

Only a few weeks before I had arrived, a group of young men, fired by Gandhi's ideas and backed by Andrews, and by senior members of the Santiniketan staff, had moved out of Santiniketan and on to the farm at Surul. They had recently returned, admitting defeat in their attempt to promote in action Gandhi's political programme for rural India. Most of them had succumbed to the virulent local form of malaria. Andrews had asked me to meet these young men soon after my arrival. We discussed together all the difficulties they had had in adapting a somewhat rigid political programme to local village conditions.

Tagore, decided, soon after he heard of this discussion, to brief me privately on his own meeting with Gandhi. 'Not long before you arrived in India', he said, 'Gandhiji came to visit me in Calcutta at my home Jorasanko. He wanted very much to persuade me to take my stand with him in public on one or other of the planks of his political platform. Gandhiji put his case to me thus : 'Gurudev, you were yourself a leader and promoter of the Swadeshi (national) movement some twenty years ago. You always wanted Indians to stand on their own feet as Indians and not to be poor copies of Westerners. My 'Swaraj' movement today is the natural offspring of your own 'Swadeshi'. Join me now and fight with me for Swaraj.' 'Gandhiji', I said, 'the whole world is suffering today from the cult of a selfish and short-sighted nationalism. India has all down her history offered hospitality to the invader of whatever nation, creed or colour. I have come to believe that, as Indians, we not only have much to learn from the West but that we also have something to contribute. We dare not therefore shut the West out. But we still have to learn among ourselves how, through education, to collaborate and achieve a common understanding.' 'Gurudev, I have already achieved Hindu-Muslim unity', said Gandhi. 'I do not agree', I answered. 'You have persuaded Muslim and Hindu to sit side by side on the political platform and to crack a whip together at the British Raj. As you well know I myself have no love at all for British

Imperialism. But how far down in their hearts and minds does this sense of unity you talk about penetrate within the minds of your Muslim and Hindu followers ? When the British either walk out, or are driven out, what, Gandhiji, will happen then ? Will Hindu and Muslim then lie down peacefully together ? You know they will not ! 'But, Gurudev, my whole programme for the winning of Swaraj is based on the principle of non-violence. That is why, Gurudev, as a poet, who believes in peace, you can feel free to ally yourself with this peaceful movement and work for it'. 'Come and look over the edge of my verandah, Gandhiji', I said, 'look down there and see what your so-called non-violent followers are up to. They have stolen those pieces of cloth from the bazaar. They've now gone and lit a bonfire with them in *my* courtyard. You can see for yourself. There they are howling around it like a lot of demented dervishes. Is that non-violence, Gandhiji ? We Indians are, as you well know, a very emotional people. Do you think you can hold our violent emotions under firm control with your non-violent principles ? No ! You know you can't. Only when the children of our different religions, communities and castes have been schooled together can you hope to overcome the violent feelings which exist today between Hindu and Muslim, between high caste and low caste'. 'Well, Gurudev', he answered, 'at least you and I are agreed that a new kind of approach to education is needed. You can lend your support to my movement for establishing a national system of education. Hundreds of young teachers and students are now, at my suggestion, leaving the Government schools and Colleges. They are enlisting in my scheme'. 'Yes, but, Gandhiji, I notice that you first pick out the brightest of the young men and enlist them in your political organisation. The less bright you allow to open schools that can offer only a travesty of education. I don't yet believe in your national schools. They have too limited an objective. This is why I am inviting scholars from all over the world to come and help and at the same time to learn something from the creative aspects in our own culture. And, Gandhiji, why do you allow your followers to call you

Mahatma ? Are you a Mahatma' ? 'No, Gurudev, of course I'm not a Mahatma. But Indians by nature have always been worshippers of symbols, of images. They need an image, Gurudev, a symbol. If they take me for one, will that not help them to mobilise and to suffer for such a noble cause' ? 'I wonder whether you are being quite fair to our people, Gandhiji, or quite honest with them' ? 'Well', said Gandhiji, 'I see my quest for your help is almost hopeless. If you can do nothing else for me, at least you can put these Bengali 'bhadralog' to shame by getting them to do something practical. Gurudev, you can spin. Why not get all your students to sit down around you and spin' ? We both laughed. 'Poems I can spin, Gandhiji', I said, 'songs and plays I can spin, but of your precious cotton what a mess I would make' !

Tagore continued : 'When I returned to India in 1921 from my visit to America and Europe I found that nearly the whole of my staff at Santiniketan had come under the direct influence of a political programme. They were so enthusiastic about the idea of Swaraj and of non-cooperation that I realised what a struggle I would have to persuade even a handful of them to think in longer educational terms about the future. I wanted them to look beyond the immediate political horizon and not to be hemmed in by narrow nationalist ideas that were already out of date. This is why I decided to release men who understand what I am after, who are eager to help with the practical work at Surul, and who see the longer term problems of the village that we must be ready to face.'

Throughout the following months, and in the diary, hints occur now and then of a pending crisis, but little did we at Surul imagine that our own tiny fraternity would feel so early the direct impact of the political ferment that was already brewing all over India and more especially in Santiniketan itself.

On p. 57 of the diary there is a reference to Tagore's decision to send down to Surul a young man named Shotyen Bose. This lad had attended neither the school nor the college at Santiniketan. All I knew of him was that he had been welcomed to Santiniketan by Andrews and had been found a temporary job

in the library. Rumour had it that he had been engaged in political activities in Burma.

My first experience of Shotyen's determination to work towards the liberation of his country from the British was when he came and asked to see me alone. He then begged for a full day's holiday for the students at Surul in order that they might celebrate together the anniversary of the horrible massacre of Indians on the order of General Dyer at Jalianwala Bagh. Knowing how deeply student and national feeling could run on such a day I asked him whether he felt that, by following the training course, agreed between the students and the Poet when they signed on to work at Surul, they were not fitting themselves more fully for Swaraj than by taking off a day's holiday for this kind of celebration. I then agreed that all those at Surul who felt they must spend a whole day of celebration at Santiniketan, with their like-minded friends, should have permission to do so. The political ferment was also liable to affect our relations with the villager. The deplorable state of our local roads was such that it was extremely difficult to move heavy loads along them of any kind in bullock carts. Were we to approach the District Board, which collected local taxes in the area with which to get these roads drained and repaired? Andrews said that such action would be against the principle of non-cooperation with the Imperial Government. Tagore argued that the villagers and farmers, who had already been taxed to pay for rural policing, roads, schools and health services, and who were now represented by their own elected representatives on the local District Board, were not likely to believe in our programme at Surul unless they found we were prepared to back them in their claim for road repairs. The Poet, who regularly discussed our local problems with Kalimohan Ghosh, our contact man with the local villagers, advised us to approach the District Board for help. But at Santiniketan there were those who stood firmly behind the political programme. They looked with scepticism, and even with distaste, at the Poet's new venture at Surul. Some too were nervous lest his interest in Santiniketan, which so often

lacked funds with which to pay salaries, might be lessened by his new and increasing enthusiasm for this venture in Rural Reconstruction. There were students' problems too. On July 15th, 1922, a letter came to me from Tagore, written from East Bengal. I quote below an excerpt from its final paragraph :

Subir's grandmother has gone to Santiniketan. Be prepared for discussions about Subir's welfare. Do not seriously argue with her—tell her firmly that this training is the only path of salvation for a boy like Subir. Do not contradict, but smile and keep silence.

Subir himself was a charming boy. Hardly conscious of the storms that circled round him, he went quietly on his way. After he had left, thanks to the intervention of his grandmother, his father and I arranged for him to attend an Engineering College in India and later on a University Course in England.

Try as best I could to calm the anxieties of Subir's grandmother, Jnanadanandini Devi, widow of Tagore's second brother, Satyendranath, I failed entirely to keep silence or to convince her that the training Subir was getting at Surul was genuinely suited to him. Subir had written her that he was 'working with his hands in the heat till after midday' and that there were 'flies in his halwa', yet in fact he was enjoying himself and improving steadily in all kinds of ways. But his grandmother had never approved of her brother-in-law's educational experiments. Being the surviving and senior lady of the Tagore family she wielded an influence within the family that could force even the Poet himself to act with circumspection. Hers was a noble and commanding presence. Faced with that penetrating eye and her queenly manner I was asked with some asperity why her grandson Subir should be given tasks better suited to coolies and sweepers ? Privately to Subir she insisted that he must return nightly to sleep in the house where she lodged at Santiniketan whilst she was in residence there. As soon as I discovered that this was happening, and that two at least of the other students were following Subir's example,

I took up his case with the Poet who had recently returned from East Bengal. The Poet told me to call all the Surul students together and to make it quite plain to them that the few simple rules, already drawn up by them and the staff together, were designed for their own benefit and that any student breaking one of these again after this warning and without good reason, would risk immediate dismissal. A grandmother's wish to have Subir expelled happened, however, to coincide exactly with Shotyen's determination to undermine the Surul plan since in the national interest it did not seem to him consistent with what he and his fellow sympathisers at Santiniketan felt was implicit in Gandhi's programme for Swaraj. Encouraged by Shotyen and by his grandmother, Subir, still continued to leave Surul after dark and to join her at Santiniketan. Another boy also went with him. On their return the following morning they were told by me that they would both have to pack their trunks and travel back to Calcutta by the early train the next day. Subir was also told that his father, Surendranath Tagore, would be meeting him in Calcutta. The whole of the student body at Surul was then summoned, and with the Indian members of staff present, was told what had happened. Up spoke three of them in turn, including Shotyen, 'then I go too', 'and I too', 'and I too'. The lorry, I said, would be ready on the morrow at 7 a.m. to take all four of them to the station.

Shotyen, determined to act loyally for the Swaraj programme as he saw it, tried that evening to organise for the next morning a strike of all our employees at Surul. No one responded. He also arranged for a protest demonstration to begin at Santiniketan at the moment when he could jump down from our Ford lorry as it passed through the Ashram the following morning.

It was a sad and silent party that assembled and then left the main building early the next day. Four out of ten of our total student body climbed on to the lorry. Alu Roy drove. Gora, Kalimohan and I went along too. We took the shorter but much rougher road direct from Surul to Bolpur station. Unwittingly, by this decision we completely upset Shotyen's

plan. He had taken for granted that we would travel via Santiniketan and that he could jump down there and start the patriotic demonstration he had already arranged. As soon as we reached Bolpur Station Shotyen and two others jumped off saying they had no intention at all of getting on to the train, and that they were going straight back to Santiniketan. Three of us put Subir on to the train, bought him a ticket and then drove quickly to the Poet's bungalow. Once there we reported to the Poet exactly what had happened. We described how Shotyen and the other two boys were already walking back towards Santiniketan hoping to promote some kind of organised protest.

The Poet immediately called to Charlie Andrews in his room across the passage. 'Charlie', he said, 'this is all your doing. You are responsible. Whilst I was away you turned my school over to politics. You must now help us to get out of this trouble. Take Alu and the lorry right away. Meet those three boys on the road. Tell them we can on no account have any of them back at Santiniketan. Take Shotyen to the station and telegraph his people. I will call the staff together and will explain to them just what has happened and the steps I am now taking.'

The closing pages of the diary show a slight gap between the date of Tagore's letter to me telling me that his senior sister-in-law was likely to be critical of our course of practical training at Surul and the short entry telling about our student protest. The protest just pre-dates the giving of my talk 'The Robbery of the Soil' in Calcutta with Tagore in the Chair. I quote herewith from Tagore's next letter to me, received whilst I was resting on the family houseboat with his nephew, Surendranath, in East Bengal :

You know my heart is with Surul. I feel that it has life in it, it does not deal with abstractions but has its roots deep in the heart of living reality. You may be absolutely certain that it will be able to weather all storms and spread its branches wide.

After my return the training course at Surul filled up again.

The staffing and the student courses were strengthened. We began too to concentrate much greater effort upon ways of working out with each village its own programme for economic, social and health rehabilitation. Our approach was still experimental. It was promoted and led by Kalimohan Ghosh and Dhirananda Roy. The latter had recently been sent from Santiniketan by Tagore on a special course for Scout-Leaders held by the Quakers in the Central Provinces. Dhira, with Masoji, the artist, both schooled at Santiniketan, had so excelled on this course that the Governor of the Central Provinces, Sir Frank Sly, had sent a special letter of congratulation to Tagore about their outstanding performances.

A fuller description of how our programme for village rehabilitation grew and developed must be given later. It was later too that the Poet came to give 'Sriniketan' as the name for the whole project instead of the more clumsy title 'Institute for Rural Reconstruction'.

In the villages the anxiety aroused by our arrival at Surul was quite as deep as it had been previously when the devotees of 'Swaraj' had arrived at Surul from Santiniketan. As Tagore watched our own progress and listened to Kalimohan's stories of the gradual breakdown of local suspicion in a number of villages around us, he became more anxious than ever to hear and to discuss every move in the programme.

The diary serves to illustrate vividly the political quandary which every day faced the staff and senior students, whether at Santiniketan or at Surul. Where did each one of us stand? We all listened to, and discussed in detail, the bold claim for instant freedom from British Imperial Rule that Gandhi was making. Andrews himself, as the diary illustrates, was a man perpetually torn over disasters like the Moplah rebellion and swept by deep emotions. At one moment he would be trying to interpret Gandhi's ideas to Tagore, at another Tagore's ideas to Gandhi. Tagore would try and reason with him like a father, but he rarely, if ever, attempted, to the best of my knowledge, to interfere with his natural enthusiasms and emotional sympathies. Every week some urgent demand

reached Andrews by telegram asking for his immediate and personal attendance at this or that demonstration or outbreak of labour unrest. I was present in Tagore's bungalow when Andrews returned from one of these forays into the outside world. He had just had an enthusiastic reception at the station from admirers at the Ashram. 'Gurudev, it is wonderful to be home. I'm quite exhausted! I never want to leave the Ashram again. In fact I just now saw Jagadananda Babu on my way here. I told him I plan to start up my English classes again from next week. I must go now and get a rest'.

'Sir Charles', the Poet jokingly answered, 'You know quite well that a telegram will arrive for you tomorrow, or the day after, with an urgent request to you to take part in some new struggle. Go and take your rest. Put the railway time-table by your bedside and with it your block of telegraph forms. Don't be in too much of a hurry to start up your English class again just yet'. They would both laugh together and Sir Charles would admit that his dearest friend was almost certainly correct in his prognostication.

But we were all involved. Rathi Tagore once told me of how, after his return from studying in America in 1909 he was nearly persuaded to join the revolutionaries in Bengal who had decided that forceful methods were the sole means left to them of bringing about the overthrow of the Imperial Government. He had at the last moment been inhibited, however, by the form of oath he was told he would have to swear at his initiation in front of the image of the goddess Kali. Kalimohan also told me of his own disillusionment with direct political action during and after the strike of the East Bengal Railway workers. With a handful of others, he said he now stood firmly behind Tagore's longer term plans, whether for the village and for an international Visva Bharati. These he felt would be needed by humanity at large whatever the ups and downs in the immediate political arena.

When convalescent from Iraq, late in 1917, and staying with my cousin, Ted Richardson, in Nainital, I had volunteered to act as Secretary to Lionel Curtis, and had been given the task

of typing out for him his final draft for the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, of the scheme whereby India could in two stages become an independent and self-governing member of the Commonwealth. This plan became, with only minor alterations, and by Act of Parliament, the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform Bill of 1919. Knowing, at that time, that the Liberal and the Labour Party in Britain were both pledged to implement the first half of this plan at an early date, I hoped and thought that the second half, whereby India was to achieve full independence as soon as either liberal-minded party came into power, would be enacted by Parliament not less than ten years later and anyhow in the early 'thirties. I had, too, firmly put my own faith in the long term process visualised by Tagore, whereby Indians of all creeds and castes would together win through to a new sense of unity via education of the Tagore variety. I too had hoped that India would achieve a balanced economy that recognised both rural and industrial and cultural priorities. I never imagined that, due first to a Tory government, then to a split in the Liberal party, then to the economic crisis of 1929, and finally to the coming of the Hitler war, combined with Churchill's imperial myopia, the day of freedom for India would be postponed for a further twenty-five years.

One final illustration of the complexities of the contemporary situation is relevant. I cannot give the exact date, I can only suggest that it was during the hot summer months of 1922, when Andrews, who had just returned from one of his frequent visits to Gandhi, appeared at Surul alone and asked for a quiet consultation. He had been discussing, he said, with Gandhi the morality of using funds that came from tainted sources for reconstruction enterprises in India. 'I told Gandhi', he said, 'about the work at Surul. Gandhi declared himself in doubt as to whether any work in India that was financed by monies raised from abroad, could bring to India permanent benefit'. I was entirely nonplussed since all our finance for Surul at that time came from Mrs Straight in the U.S.A. I made no answer. If Gandhi really felt that way, then how was the Surul enterprise to be justified at all in his mind? Some twenty years later,

after Andrews' death, I was able to ask Gandhi, in person, just how he came to express such an idea to Andrews. 'I cannot imagine', he answered, 'my ever expressing to Andrews such an opinion or using just those terms'. Andrews' mind was, as the diary shows, not always clear in its operation. He could be swept off balance by the intensity of his emotions.

To Andrews and Pearson any idea of keeping even a working touch with any official of the British Establishment in India in 1922 was almost anathema. Their joint experience with stupid police methods, whether in Africa or in India, had never been a happy one. Tagore did not hesitate to contact either Viceroy or Governor direct, if need arose. Early in 1922 he sent me with a letter to the Governor's Private Secretary in Calcutta asking whether he would help me to find out whether the police were setting an official block in the way of some sensible development for Santiniketan.

The diary therefore brings to a close the first chapter of the Surul enterprise. The experience gained, and relevant to Tagore's own ideas, was incorporated at the time in the lecture 'The Robbery of the Soil'.

On my return from East Bengal in August 1922 Tagore asked me to accompany him on a visit to Mysore. He said he wanted me to be away from Surul long enough to give the staff there a chance to find their own feet and to take full responsibility for progress in my absence. He also wanted me to meet Miss Gretchen Green who was due to arrive from America in Bombay. Miss Green was to be instrumental in setting up a Village Health Centre and Clinic at Surul. It was with this clinic as a base that Kalimohan Ghosh built his Cooperative Health Societies in the region around Bolpur.

The initial differences of approach of these two men, Tagore and Gandhi, to the idea of a free and self-governing India, remained. Their deep respect, affection and understanding for each other increased as the years went by. That in 1922 they had real anxieties about one another's programme is true. To the everlasting benefit of historical truth, it is still, I consider, important to recognise the basic difference in their approach

and in the scale of their respective values. The part too that Charlie Andrews himself played in the process of clarification should not be forgotten.

LEONARD ELMHIRST

THE ROBBERY OF THE SOIL

INTRODUCTION BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The standard of living in modern civilisation has been raised far higher than the average level of our necessity. The strain which this entails serves at the outset to increase our physical and mental alertness. The claim upon our energy accelerates growth. This in its turn produces activity that expresses itself by raising life's standard still higher.

When this standard attains a degree that is a great deal above the normal it encourages the passion of greed. The temptation of an inordinately high level of living, which was once confined only to a small section of the community, becomes widespread. The burden is sure to prove fatal to the civilisation which puts no restraint upon the emulation of self-indulgence.

In the geography of our economic world the ups and downs produced by inequalities of fortune are healthy only within a moderate range. In a country divided by the constant interruption of steep mountains no great civilisation is possible because in such places the natural flow of communication is always difficult. Like mountains, large fortunes and the enjoyment of luxury are also high walls of segregation ; they produce worse divisions in society than any physical barriers.

Where life is simple wealth does not become too exclusive and owners of individual property find no great difficulty in acknowledging their communal responsibility. In fact wealth can even become the best channel for social communication. In former days in India public opinion levied heavy taxes upon wealth and most of the public works of the country were voluntarily contributed by the rich. The water supply, medical help, education and amusement, were naturally maintained by men of property through a spontaneous sense of mutual obligation. This was made possible because the limits set to the individual right of self-indulgence were narrow and surplus wealth easily followed the channel of social responsibility. In such a society



Rabindranath Tagore and L. K. Elmhirst

Photo : Devendra Satyarthi

civilisation was supported by strong pillars of property, and wealth gave opportunity to the fortunate for self-sacrifice.

But, with the rise of the standard of living, property changes its aspect. It shuts the gate of hospitality which is the best means of social communication. Its owners display their wealth in an extravagance which is self-centred. This creates envy and irreconcilable class division. In other words property becomes anti-social.

Because property itself, with what is called material progress, has become intensely individualistic, the method of gaining it has become a matter of science and not of social ethics. Property and its acquisition break social bonds and drain the life sap of the community. The unscrupulousness involved plays havoc the world over and generates a force that can coax or coerce peoples to deeds of injustice and of wholesale horror.

The forest fire feeds upon the living world from which it springs till it exhausts itself completely along with its fuel. When a passion like greed breaks loose from the fence of social control it acts like that fire, feeding upon the life of society. The end is annihilation. It has ever been the object of the spiritual training of man to fight those passions that are anti-social and to keep them chained. But lately abnormal temptation has set them free and they are fiercely devouring all that is affording them fuel.

There are always insects in our harvest field which, in spite of their robbery, tend to leave a sufficient surplus for the tillers of the soil, so that it does not pay us to try to exterminate them altogether. But when some pest, that has an enormous power of self multiplication, attacks our total food crop we must consider this a great calamity. In human society, in normal circumstances, there are many causes that make for wastage, yet it does not cost us much to ignore them. But today the blight that has fallen upon our social life and its resources is disastrous because it is not restricted within reasonable limits. This is an epidemic of voracity that has infected the total area of civilisation. We all claim our right, and freedom, to be extravagant in our enjoyment if we can afford it. Not to be

able to waste as much upon myself as my rich neighbour does merely proves a poverty in myself of which I am ashamed, and against which my women folk, and other parasites, naturally cherish their own grievance. Ours is a society in which, through its tyrannical standard of respectability, all the members are goading each other to spoil themselves to the utmost limit of their capacity. There is a continual screwing up of the ideal level of convenience and comfort, the increase in which is proportionately less than the energy it consumes. The very shriek of advertisement itself, which constantly accompanies the progress of unlimited production, involves the squandering of an immense quantity of material and of life force which merely helps to swell the sweepings of time. Civilisation today caters for a whole population of gluttons. An intemperance, which could safely have been tolerated in a few, has spread its contagion to the multitude. This universal greed, which now infects us all, is the cause of every kind of meanness, of cruelty and of lies in politics and commerce, and vitiates the whole human atmosphere. A civilisation, which has attained such an unnatural appetite, must, for its continuing existence, depend upon numberless victims. These are being sought in those parts of the world where human flesh is cheap. In Asia and Africa a bartering goes on through which the future hope and happiness of entire peoples is sold for the sake of providing some fastidious fashion with an endless supply of respectable rubbish.

The consequence of such a material and moral drain is made evident when one studies the condition manifested in the grossness of our cities and the physical and mental anaemia of the villages almost everywhere in the world. For cities inevitably have become important. The city represents energy and materials concentrated for the satisfaction of an exaggerated appetite, and this concentration is considered to be a symptom of civilisation. The devouring process of such an abnormality cannot be carried on unless certain parts of the social body conspire and organise to feed upon the whole. This is suicidal ; but, before a gradual degeneracy ends in death, the disproportionate enlargement of the particular portion looks formidably great.

It conceals the starved paller of the entire body. The illusion of wealth becomes evident because certain portions grow large on their robbery of the whole.

A living relationship, in a physical, or in a social body, depends upon sympathetic collaboration and helpfulness between the various individual organs or members. When a perfect balance of interchange begins to operate, a consciousness of unity develops that is no longer easy to obstruct. The resulting health or wealth are both secondary to this sense of unity which is the ultimate end and aim, and a creation in its own right. Whenever some sectarian ambition for power establishes a dominating position in life's republic, the sense of unity, which can only be generated and maintained by a perfect rhythm of reciprocity between the parts, is bound to be disturbed. In a society, where the greed of an individual or of a group is allowed to grow uncontrolled, and is encouraged or even applauded by the populace, democracy, as it is termed in the West, cannot be truly realised. In such an atmosphere a constant struggle goes on among individuals to capture public organisations for the satisfaction of their own personal ambition. Thus democracy becomes like an elephant whose one purpose in life is to give joy rides to the clever and to the rich. The organs of information and expression, through which opinions are manufactured, and the machinery of administration, are openly or secretly manipulated by the prosperous few, by those who have been compared to the camel which can never pass through the needle's eye, that narrow gate that leads to the kingdom of ideals. Such a society necessarily becomes inhospitable, suspicious, and callous towards those who preach their faith in ideals, in spiritual freedom. In such a society people become intoxicated by the constant stimulation of what they are told is progress, like the man for whom wine has a greater attraction than food.

Villages are like woman. In their keep is the cradle of the race. They are nearer to nature than the towns and are therefore in closer touch with the fountain of life. They have the atmosphere which possesses a natural power of healing. Like

woman they provide people with their elemental needs, with food and joy, with the simple poetry of life and with those ceremonies of beauty which the village spontaneously produces and in which she finds delight. But when constant strain is put upon her through the extortionate claims of ambition, when her resources are exploited through the excessive stimulus of temptation, then she becomes poor in life. Her mind becomes dull and uncreative ; and, from her time-honoured position as the wedded partner of the city, she is degraded to that of maid servant. The city, in its intense egotism and pride, remains blissfully unconscious of the devastation it is continuously spreading within the village, the source and origin of its own life, health and joy.

True happiness is not at all expensive. It depends upon that natural spring of beauty and of life, harmony of relationship. Ambition pursues its own path of self-seeking by breaking this bond of harmony, digging gaps, creating dissension. Selfish ambition feels no hesitation in trampling under foot the whole harvest field, which is for all, in order to snatch away in haste that portion which it craves. Being wasteful it remains disruptive of social life and the greatest enemy of civilisation.

In India we had a family system of our own, large and complex, each family a miniature society in itself. I do not wish to discuss the question of its desirability, but its rapid decay in the present day clearly points out the nature and process of the principle of destruction which is at work in modern civilisation. When life was simple, needs normal, when selfish passions were under control, such a domestic life was perfectly natural and truly productive of happiness. The family resources were sufficient for all. Claims from one or more individuals of that family were never excessive. But such a group can never survive if the personal ambition of a single member begins separately to clamour for a great deal more than is absolutely necessary for him. When the determination to augment private possession, and to enjoy exclusive advantage, runs ahead of the common good and of general happiness, the bond of harmony,

which is the bond of creation, must give way and brothers must separate, nay, even become enemies.

This passion of greed that rages in the heart of our present civilisation, like a volcanic flame of fire, is constantly struggling to erupt in individual bloatedness. Such eruptions must disturb man's creative mind. The flow of production which gushes from the cracks rent in society gives the impression of a hugely indefinite gain. We forget that the spirit of creation can only evolve out of our own inner abundance and so add to our true wealth. A sudden increase in the flow of production of things tends to consume our resources and requires us to build new storehouses. Our needs, therefore, which stimulate this increasing flow, must begin to observe the limitation of normal demand. If we go on stoking our demands into bigger and bigger flames the conflagration that results will, no doubt, dazzle our sight, but its splendour will leave on the debit side only a black heap of charred remains. When our wants are moderate, the rations we each claim do not exhaust the common store of nature and the pace of their restoration does not fall hopelessly behind that of our consumption. This moderation leaves us leisure to cultivate happiness, that happiness which is the artist soul of the human world, and which can create beauty of form and rhythm of life. But man today forgets that the divinity within him is revealed by the halo of this happiness. The Germany of the period of Goethe was considered to be poverty stricken by the Germany of the period of Bismarck. Possibly the standard of civilisation, illuminated by the mind of Plato, or by the life of the Emperor Asoka, is underrated by the proud children of modern times who compare former days with the present age of progress, an age dominated by millionaires, diplomats and war lords. Many things that are of common use today were absolutely lacking in those days. But are the people that lived then to be pitied by the young of our day who enjoy so much more from the printing press but so much less from the mind ?

I often imagine that the moon, being smaller in size than the earth, produced the condition for life to be born on her

soil earlier than was possible on the soil of her companion. Once she too perhaps had her constant festival of colour, of music and of movement ; her store-house was perpetually replenished with food for her children. Then in course of time some race was born to her that was gifted with a furious energy of intelligence, and that began greedily to devour its own surroundings. It produced beings who, because of the excess of their animal spirit, coupled with intellect and imagination, failed to realise that the mere process of addition did not create fulfilment ; that mere size of acquisition did not produce happiness ; that greater velocity of movement did not necessarily constitute progress, and that change could only have meaning in relation to some clear ideal of completeness. Through machinery of tremendous power this race made such an addition to their natural capacity for gathering and holding, that their career of plunder entirely outstripped nature's power for recuperation. Their profit makers dug big holes in the stored capital of the planet. They created wants which were unnatural and provision for these wants was forcibly extracted from nature. When they had reduced the limited store of material in their immediate surroundings they proceeded to wage furious wars among their different sections, each wanting his own special allotment of the lion's share. In their scramble for the right of self-indulgence they laughed at moral law and took it to be a sign of superiority to be ruthless in the satisfaction each of his own desire. They exhausted the water, cut down the trees, reduced the surface of the planet to a desert, riddled with enormous pits, and made its interior a rifled pocket, emptied of its valuables. At last one day the moon, like a fruit whose pulp had been completely eaten by the insects which it had sheltered, became a hollow shell, a universal grave for the voracious creatures who insisted upon consuming the world into which they had been born. In other words, they behaved exactly in the way human beings of today are behaving upon this earth, fast exhausting their store of sustenance, not because they must live their normal life, but because they wish to live at a pitch of monstrous excess. Mother Earth has enough for the

healthy appetite of her children and something extra for rare cases of abnormality. But she has not nearly sufficient for the sudden growth of a whole world of spoiled and pampered children.

Man has been digging holes into the very foundations not only of his livelihood but of his life. He is now feeding upon his own body. The reckless waste of humanity which ambition produces is best seen in the villages where the light of life is gradually being dimmed, the joy of existence dulled, and the natural bonds of social communion are being snapped every day. It should be our mission to restore the full circulation of life's blood into these martyred limbs of society ; to bring to the villagers health and knowledge ; a wealth of space in which to live, a wealth of time in which to work, to rest and enjoy mutual respect which will give them dignity ; sympathy which will make them realise their kinship with the world of men, and not merely their position of subservience.

Streams, lakes and oceans are there on this earth. They exist not for the hoarding of water exclusively each within its own area. They send up the vapour which forms into clouds and helps in a wide distribution of water. Cities have a special function in maintaining wealth and knowledge in concentrated forms of opulence, but this should not be for their own exclusive sake ; they should not magnify themselves, but should enrich the entire society. They should be like the lamp post, for the light it supports must transcend its own limits. Such a relationship of mutual benefit between the city and the village remains strong only so long as the spirit of cooperation and self-sacrifice is a living ideal in society as a whole. When some universal temptation overcomes this ideal, when some selfish passion finds ascendancy, then a gap is formed and widened between them. The mutual relationship between city and village becomes that of exploiter and victim. This is a form of perversity in which the body becomes its own enemy. The termination is death.

We have started in India, in connection with Visva-Bharati, a kind of village work the mission of which is to retard

this process of race suicide. If I try to give you details of the work the effort will look small. But we are not afraid of this appearance of smallness, for we have confidence in life. We know that if, as a seed, smallness represents the truth that is in us, it will overcome opposition and conquer space and time. According to us the poverty problem is not so important. It is the problem of unhappiness that is the great problem. The search for wealth, which is the synonym for the production and collection of things, can make use of men ruthlessly, can crush life out of the earth, and for a time can flourish. Happiness may not compete with wealth in its list of needed materials, but it is final, it is creative, therefore it has its own source of riches within itself. Our object is to try to flood the choked bed of village life with streams of happiness. For this the scholars, the poets, the musicians, the artists as well as the scientists have to collaborate, have to offer their contribution. Otherwise they live like parasites, sucking life from the country people, and giving nothing back to them. Such exploitation gradually exhausts the soil of life, the soil which needs constant replenishing by the return of life to it, through the completion of the cycle of receiving and giving back.

The writer of the following paper, who was in charge of the rural work in Visva-Bharati, forcibly drew our attention to this subject and made it clear to us that the civilisation which allows its one part to exploit the rest without making any return is merely cheating itself into bankruptcy. It is like the foolish young man, who suddenly inheriting his father's business, steals his own capital and spends it in a magnificent display of extravagance. He dazzles the imagination of the onlookers, he gains applause from his associates in his dissipation, he becomes the most envied man in his neighbourhood till the morning when he wakes up, in surprise, to a state of complete indigence. Most of us who try to deal with the poverty problem think of nothing else but of a greater intensive effort of production, forgetting that this only means a greater exhaustion of materials as well as of humanity, and this means giving a still better opportunity for profit to the few at the cost of the many. But it is food

which nourishes and not money. It is fullness of life which makes us happy and not fullness of purse. Multiplying materials intensifies the inequality between those who have and those who have not. This is the worst wound from which the social body can suffer. It is a wound through which the body is bled to death !

THE ROBBERY OF THE SOIL

Some eighteen months ago, while studying in America, I received a wire from Dr Tagore asking me to see him in New York. During the few minutes we were together he did me the honour of inviting me to come out to India and to initiate at the new University some kind of Agricultural work. At that time our ideas of the form which such work should take were probably equally hazy. Eight months later, when we discussed our plans in detail at Santiniketan, we discovered that they were almost identical. Since January last we have been very busy trying to put those plans into action. In placing before you the nature of the problems with which we have had to deal and some of our experiences in the course of our attempts to deal with them, I am going to beg beforehand for your criticism and your help. Whether you are students of Arts or Science, these are problems which concern you deeply in your lives, as individuals, and as members of a community. But let me warn you from the start that, like Don Quixote, we are setting out to tilt at those windmill theories and fictions which the popular imagination delights to set up. For this reason, and in order to get a firm basis upon which to form conclusions, I am going to ask you to examine a few of the facts about the basis of our activity, the soil—the soil of your Motherland.

Some of you may have heard that it was the custom of the great pianist and composer, Chopin, to carry round Europe wherever he went, a bowl of Polish Earth, the last gift of his friends before he was driven out of his own country, a wanderer and an exile. It is to such love of your native soil that I wish to appeal in this opening lecture. For, whether you have considered it or not, you are not merely the inheritors, but the actual product of the soil around you. Less attention perhaps has been paid to this fact by historians, scientists and statesman

A lecture delivered under the auspices of the Visva-Bharati Sammilani, as one of a series of extension lectures of the Visva-Bharati, at the Rammohun Library, on the 28 July 1922, Rabindranath Tagore presiding and printed in *The Modern Review*, October 1922.

in the past than it has deserved. The Farmer, however, is never able to take his eyes off the soil for long with impunity. When Dr Tagore handed over to us his farm at the village of Surul in the Birbhum district, as the basis of our operations for the founding of a school of Agriculture and the study of village economics, we were compelled to examine not merely the condition of the soil around us, but the history, social, economic and political, which lies behind that condition.

The Surul farm stands on what is by rail the nearest rising ground to Calcutta. The ocean of green paddy fields which covers so much of Bengal finds its limit at our door, and behind us stretches a rapidly increasing area of red laterite desert, which today supports neither man nor beast, but which once was covered by thick forest and jungle. The changes which have taken place in our neighbourhood during the last hundred years are not unlike the changes which heralded the downfall of most of the great empires of the world, which nearly wrecked England, and which certainly helped to break Rome. This historical aspect I propose to discuss in a subsequent lecture and will not detain you with it now.

A journey through the district of Birbhum will show even to the casual observer that all is not well. The press is constantly giving you statistics showing the increasing death rate, the all powerful sway of malaria and disease, the grinding poverty and the frequency of famine in this area. The press is not misinformed as to the facts. Before we talk about them I shall make one generalisation. At the bottom of the trouble lies the treatment of the soil. In a rural country such as India the soil must be the main source of wealth, yet for some reason or other the people in this part of Bengal are not succeeding in extracting sufficient wealth from the soil for their subsistence. You may object that the district is notorious for its poor soil, and that the wealth is not there. But in this, history is against you. The Birbhum area was once the richest district of Bengal, and supported upon the cultivation of the soil a large and flourishing community.

It is not difficult to rebuild the past from the relics that are

still to be seen. In the days before there was any Calcutta, when there were no railways and few roads, when imports and exports were small, a large population lived and flourished in this district. The evidence however goes to prove that the whole basis of their life was different from the basis of life today. Go to the district headquarters or to one of the more wealthy villages and you may find monuments erected during the last fifty years to this merchant prince or to that administrator but the monuments of the ancient inhabitants were of a different nature and give us the secret of their life as well as the secret which, I firmly believe, will give a solution to the troubles of the country today. In the ruins of their ancient temples, and the remnants of their irrigation systems there is conclusive proof of an elaborate community life. The temples of old maintained by worshippers were the symbols of community life. The well-kept tanks were the symbols of community agriculture, the hall mark of the proper treatment of the soil, but in no village today will you see bunds in repair or a tank in good order. Without exception the beautiful old temples, on which so much devoted workmanship was lavished, are falling into ruin ; in the villages I have visited I have failed to find a new temple built or an old one repaired. The community life is gone, the competitive life has come in and has brought death with it.

Do not imagine that the day of the old village community was the Golden Age or that such a community was a kind of paradise on earth. In its way it was perhaps happier and better than anything that we have worked out in this modern age, but that it was narrow and confined and easily upset there is no doubt. Some people crave to return to this community life in its old form. In these miserable days that may be a very natural craving but is it possible of satisfaction ? Are we willing to sacrifice our roads, our railways, our universities, our cities and our commerce and intellectual communion with the outside world ? Even if we are, such a course is hardly practicable. May I offer an alternative?— That instead of going back we should go forward, and using these tools of the modern world

—the modern chaos if you like— rebuild therewith that old community life of the villages on a surer, a firmer and a sounder basis. If we are not willing to do this, but persist in using modern science, business and law to exploit and destroy our neighbours, the soil will revenge itself upon us, as it has begun to do already.

The facts speak for themselves. Fundamental among nature's laws is that which allows no race of farmers to take more out of the soil than they put in. I am not referring to those delta areas which are each year refreshed with a new soil through the erosion of the high lands. Robbery of such soils may go on with impunity. But where scientific farming has to be carried on, men succeed insofar as they repay the soil generously for that which they have taken from it. You remember the old rhyme—

Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard,
To fetch her poor dog a bone,
But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog got none !

The soil is like a cupboard and its condition today is reduced to that of old Mother Hubbard.

In the olden days enough land was cultivated to give the village population the food it needed. Firewood came from the common grazing grounds and forests, and slack times were spent in manufacturing from raw products articles for household use or for exchange, only if there was a market near, to which safe export was possible over the bad roads, perhaps infested with robbers. The production of food was a community enterprise and the proper treatment of the soil with irrigation and manure was a community responsibility. But with the insatiable demand of the modern city, with the coming of easy means of communication, all that is gone. He who can steal most from the soil and ship it off in return for money survives, and his less fortunate neighbour perishes.

For the sake of convenience we may divide the foods for

which we are dependent upon the soil into those that maintain life and those that give energy or power. It is a rough division but it will serve our purpose. Into those which give energy fall the fats, the starches and sugars or carbohydrates largely manufactured from the air, the water in the soil, and the sun. Into those that maintain life fall all those foods which rebuild the living cells of which our bodies are made. For all living matter is cellular and all living cells contain Nitrogen and are in some manner dependent upon those peculiar substances known as vitamins. Without these there can be no life and the soil is the only available source of Nitrogen, Iron, Lime, Potassium, Sulphur, Phosphorus and Magnesium, and the other elements which compose the animal and human body must also be drawn by plants from the soil. To continue indefinitely taking any of these life-forming elements from the soil, without adequately replacing them, is robbery, not merely of the soil itself, but of the future generations which have to live upon it. Thus the damage done, as in the District of Birbhum, and over large parts of India today, is irreparable. It is well to remember that everything you see around you, your friends, your animals, your clothes, your books, your furniture, the food you eat and the fuel you use, all represent a drain upon the soil of your country, or of some one else's.

In the olden days enough pulse and sugarcane were grown in Birbhum to satisfy the needs of the community. No food was exported. Now rice is, with a few exceptions, the only crop. The growing of a rabi crop demands community effort in irrigation, except where one man is rich enough to do things for himself. Of this rice little or nothing finds its way back to the fields. Ease of communication enables the middleman to purchase the bulk of it and to ship it off to Calcutta, or to the coal fields, and the waste products which the soil needs pass in the form of dung and urine down the sewer into the river. Even of that portion which remains in the village and is consumed there, the waste is deposited round about the houses, or is thrown into the tanks and, in any case, is, for the most part, lost to the soil. Of the straw some is sold for thatch,

some is eaten by bullocks and the waste is either burnt or littered in open pits in the village in such a way that it becomes of little use to the soil even when it is returned. The urine is lost inside the village residential area. The very mode of cooking and eating the rice is one which the Chinaman rightly does not tolerate, the rice water being thrown away or given to the cattle. At death neither man nor cow returns to the soil whence they came. The hides of the cows find their way to the West and the bones to Japan. Both contain valuable soil constituents. Each man digs a pit where he likes, from which he takes the earth to build his house, and leaves it to be filled with rejected, decaying matter, which properly treated would have gone to enrich the soil.

Of all thieves the cities are the most ruthless. In the race to satisfy their demands the present individualistic type of society, with its enslavement of the uneducated masses, its lawsuits, its lack of culture and of all finer feelings and ideals, has completely obliterated the old common life in which all, from the Brahman at the top to the labourers at the bottom, were servants of the common welfare. Nowadays, in the scramble for gold and power, nutritious food, sanitary considerations and civic amenities are sacrificed. The soil is given no chance to do its part, and poverty and disease, floods, famines and fighting in law-courts complete the dismal picture. When the diet is incomplete and insufficient, the life and energy of the people is sapped, and community effort comes to an end, then malaria, mosquitoes, flies and harmful bacteria have free play. The uncleaned tanks form death traps and railway embankments are allowed to assist the work of the Anopheles. Rivers that were once easy flowing, navigable streams have silted up. The trees that once held the soil to the uplands which were not fit for cultivation found a value in the towns when the railways and roads made transport feasible, and were cut down mercilessly. Thereupon the heavy rains quickly washed the upper soil away, filled up the streams with the underlying sand and only the raw, red, backing desert is left. Worst of all, perhaps is the continual drain of the best brains and bodies, all products of the soil, from the villages

into the cities, leaving only the idlers, the aged, or the enslaved to quarrel, to oppress, or to starve, according to their position.

I have drawn a grim picture. But any of you who are students of history will be able to point to many parallels in the past. The breakdown of rural community life in England and in Rome, with the growth of the big city, was naturally followed by tenant farming and absentee landlordism. Such tenant farming is always disastrous for the soil. The tenant has no permanent interest in its fertility and only carries on those activities which will give him a living without bringing on a rise in his rent. The city takes all and returns little or nothing of real value to the soil. But worst of all, that spirit of independence, of good fellowship, of common suffering and service, of common recreation, rejoicing and worship disappears and a far more primitive life, not unrelated to that of the cave man in spite of what are called the amenities of civilisation, takes its place.

I cannot do more than sketch the remedies for the present situation. That there are remedies, and that it is possible to rebuild the old community life on a broader basis, I am firmly convinced. It is not a case of going back, except to draw on the old experience, but rather of going forward. First of all, there is no need to wait for Government initiative. The spirit of freedom, which is the spirit of community life, springs from the demand of the people themselves. Outside agencies can stimulate that demand, they can encourage its growth, they can water the tender plant and fertilise the soil, but they cannot dictate freedom. Secondly the problem is an all round problem. There is no one solution, though, once the right spirit has been quickened, solution of all problems becomes possible.

Let me give you some instances. Once we tried a temperance campaign. When I asked a Santal why he went nightly to the toddy shop for his drink, he answered that, if I could suggest any other way of giving him the feeling that he had had a belly-full for such a small sum, he was ready to adopt it. 'How else', he said, 'can I forget my hunger and my troubles? After a good drink I feel like a Raja.' The *charka* was tried, together with the growing of cotton, but neither the soil nor the present

methods of cultivation admit of cotton growing. Nor can a man fill his belly on the *charka* and the chief trouble in Birbhum is empty bellies. On the other hand, the community spirit is there and only waits for development. 'Show us how to co-operate in our irrigation,' say the *chashas*. 'Will you help us to improve our dairy cattle?' say the *gowalas*. 'We gather the raw hides and send them to Calcutta and have to buy back the finished leather if we want to make anything,' say the *muchis*. 'We cannot get good medicine or treatment for our sick,' or again, 'We are willing to supply the labour and the carts if you will help us to put our road in order.' 'We'll gather Rs. 500 tomorrow for a cooperative store if you will provide us with a storeman whom we can trust,' said the *panchayat* in a Muhammadan village. You see it is that element of mutual trust which is being destroyed and which must be revived as the basis of all community endeavour.

How were we to help all these people to help themselves. Some warned us against using Government Agencies. But could we let the villagers go on starving and die? We decided to apply for help wherever willing help was forthcoming. For the weavers we received it from a private agency. For the *muchis* and the *chashas*, the Research Tannery in Calcutta, the Veterinary Department, and the local Agricultural Officer gave us invaluable assistance. In the Hindu villages where once the community spirit was strongest, there is most opposition to combined effort. Somehow, perhaps owing to their comparatively varied diet, more social habits and greater adaptability, the Muhammadan and Santal are seen to be surviving where the Hindu is rapidly dying out. Nevertheless I feel there is still hope for all. 'Give me the small children; and in ten years I will turn your traditions upside down,' said a great educator. Our experience shows that in the matter of sanitation of villages, whilst the older boys scoff and the parents are cynical the small boys, once their imagination is touched, will carry out a given programme and eventually win their own elders to community activity.

Let me repeat again, there is no universal panacea, no catch-

word cure. Agricultural advance alone is not necessarily beneficial. Improvement in method may mean no more than improved exploitation of soil or neighbour for selfish benefit. Elementary education of a kind which the people will welcome and which they can afford, must go hand in hand with community organisation for buying and selling, for manufacturing and irrigation, for cultivation and sanitation. Nor is it merely a matter of forming cooperative societies, though it is quite true that there is a close relation between the spirit in which a successful cooperative society is started and that which must lie behind any genuine community life.

If only the right spirit is there, or if the right spirit can be infused, there need be little difficulty. And for the young man of today there is no higher calling than that of a trained village worker. But, we should remember, there is no calling which demands such rigorous training, or so much self-discipline. First of all, the village worker should be able to support himself by his own hands as well as to be of all round service to the people. The day has gone when people imagined that boys fresh from school or college could revolutionise village life without any attempt to study the villager's point of view, to sympathise with his sufferings, to bind up his wounds and to enter into his most intimate life. Progress must be from the bottom up, and such a worker must be willing and able, as Mahatma Gandhi has pointed out, not merely to do the sweeper's job himself, but to show the sweeper how to do it better. And above all it is for him to hold up before the villagers the standard of a pure and selfless life.

Denmark has its cooperative production ; Yorkshire has its cooperative consumers' associations ; and in America cooperation in the accumulation of wealth is making rapid progress ; but it should be for India to lead the way towards cooperation for life, for a fuller and more abundant life, both spiritual and material, because the memory of such a life in the past is not yet dead and the will to sacrifice material acquisition for the pursuit of high ideals and spiritual gain, is perhaps, more alive in the soil of India today than anywhere else in the wide world.

SRINIKETAN DIARY

Monday, November 21, 1921

I had hoped to leave Calcutta at 10.30 a.m. yesterday, Sunday morning, but calling at the Great Eastern Hotel at 9.45 I found Miss Gertrude Emerson there. She is correspondent for *Asia* magazine. (This magazine had been founded by Willard and Dorothy Straight in New York in 1915 as a medium through which scholarly articles on the arts, archaeology and history of Asiatic countries might find expression for serious students and readers). I spent too long with her. The train for Bolpur departed without me. Miss Emerson was not at all like the person I had imagined. Short of stature, angular in face, with penetrating eyes and unkempt hair, but very much alive. Full of common sense and level headed I guessed and well accustomed to take care of herself.

She set out to extract from me all I could tell her of the struggle at Cornell (the fraternity boys had tried to drive the 'coeds' off the campus by making difficulties for them. Her brother had been one of the leaders in the campaign) and of her brother's misdemeanours when I was his chief antagonist and on the side of the 'coeds'. In the light of her months of living in India she went on to give me some of her impressions. 'Behind Gandhi and his movement there is so far mainly a natural sentiment and national sympathy but with as yet not a great deal of constructive thought or leadership. Everything seems to centre around his own extraordinary personality. From the British official world I can get very little about India except generalisations to the effect that 'the Indian is not to be trusted'. But so many of the officials seem to have lost the direct touch with India and Indians that they used to have and I find that villages like Behala (some five miles outside Calcutta then) untouched by the *Raj* (Rule, i.e. British Imperial Government).'

Sunday, November 27, 1921

Leaving my things at Howrah, I tramped and then walked two miles to the famous Calcutta botanical gardens, finished

reading Jack's *Economics of a Bengal District*, smoked a pipe and meditated upon the coming venture. The air was perfect and the gardens luxuriantly beautiful.

With the help of a river steamer I returned to Howrah in time for the train. Into my carriage climbed an elderly Bengali, then a drunken Anglo-Indian who was soon hustled out again, and finally a tiny, faun-like Anglo-Indian girl with her husband and their first baby. Like so many of her race she had the delicate ankles and fingers and the languorous eyes of an Oriental. Her husband was of much the same slimness of build, but the English part of him came out in the face. Both were mild and gentle looking folk, though somewhat surprised when I removed my socks, put on sandals and later drew my feet up and sat cross-legged on the seat. This moved the Bengali gentleman to enquire where I was going. The son was much more excited than his father when he heard of my destination.

At 10 p.m. I descended at Bolpur and found Pearson and Rathi Tagore, the poet's son, waiting for me. They had gone to meet the morning train and had only got my telegram an hour before this train came in. It was pitch-dark. I found myself whirled away in a Ford car for two miles, then in through wide gates to a large commodious looking old house of white plaster on brick with an upstairs verandah.

I was shown up into what might have been the guest-room of any large English bungalow in India, though most sparsely and simply furnished. Pearson, with whom I had shared a cabin on the way out as far as Aden, left me after telling me how, from the time he landed in Bombay, he had been watched by two policemen and various inspectors, and urged me not to rise too early. In a few minutes I was sound asleep.

Monday, November 28, 1921

By seven on Monday I was up and out and called at the post office across the way and learnt that my letters had been taken to the library to the south under the old mango trees.

The library was shut. On the way back I passed a little white man in khaki shorts with his white shirt hanging out Indian fashion, and wished him good morning. No answer. I was introduced in the evening. A delightful Austrian named Bay, an Industrial Chemist, who is engaged upon an attempt to purify ground-nut oil that it might be used for cooking in the home. *Chhota hazri* (little breakfast) with filthy milk, arrived at 8.00 and after it I collected my mail, but with no word from the U.S.A. I had just finished reading my letters from home when Pearson appeared and led me away to meet Tagore. *Gurudev*, as he is called here, that is 'inspired teacher'. There under a mango tree was the kindly old Poet.

He was anxious, he said, because I had missed my train and full of pleasant words of welcome. Leading me to his own little shelter we sat on the low mud wall which served as a class-room for his pupils and together we ran over the plan.

At each point in my sketch he would interrupt. 'That is just what I had in mind,' or 'for years we have been waiting and hoping for something like this.' At the end of half an hour he handed me over to Rathi, his son, and introduced me to Santosh Majumdar. They are both graduates of Urbana, Illinois and fine folks to meet. In fact, so far, every moment has been a joy simply because one is for ever meeting more interesting and kindly souls without fuss or artificiality. The breadth of view they combine with a quite delicious and, at time, subtle sense of humour, would put that of most Western academics quite in the shade.

Santosh Majumdar took me to his farm. We talked poultry, dairy and bees. We then went a mile and a half to Surul by car to see the farm. At first sight it looks an ideal spot for the purpose. So much of the ground work has already been done. So many things have already been thought of. Now we need to gather men and experience from all around and to put our plans into action.

We would see strings of trotting coolies, fluid labour I gathered, Santals, an aborigine people of the ancient forests

and jungles, but now landless labourers, compelled to hire out their labour wherever they can find employment. The women carry a bundle on their heads and a red flower in their hair, the men a bamboo over the shoulder with a basket strung from each end. In one, and sometimes in both, a baby sitting, or a baby in one and cooking pots in the other. Another group of the same people had killed a large wild boar and was carrying it slung on a pole between two men. They were crying out to discover at which of their villages the great roast should be celebrated tomorrow.

I was introduced to the art school and have been asked to help with the games tomorrow and to start my Bengali lessons with a Mr Ghosh, once of Cambridge, an economist and scholar in German. Lunch and tea I shared with Pearson and Rathi, but Pearson says he reserves the time after 6 p.m. for uninterrupted meditation. Andrews is due to return from Africa tomorrow. It is all too good to be true. Can this dream last ?

The fashion here when meeting Tagore is to lean down and make as if to touch and 'take the dust from the feet' with one hand as a mode of greeting. The same custom is followed by the children in the school when they meet their teachers. I can't get myself to follow the fashion yet. Pearson always greets Tagore with this salutation, and when I raised the matter with him, he said, 'Do whatever comes most natural to you. The Bengali habit of salutation with joined hands and bended head seems to come natural to you and there are so few here who have been abroad and who will want or expect to shake hands that a western salute is not really necessary.' I have always saluted Tagore as everyone else does here and have called him 'Gurudev' as they all do. I know this annoys the Christian missionary folk, they suspect me of trying to deify him. There is too a difference in the degree to which you bow your head according to the age of the people you are meeting. Today I forgot myself, much to the amusement of one of my Bengali colleagues. I was passing a group of girls who used to be my pupils. I bowed quite low in saluting them. 'You forget that you are only saluting your pupils' he said. 'I

had only felt that I was saluting members of the female sex.'

Tuesday, November 29, 1921

I was up and around by 7 a.m. No *chhota hazri* had arrived, but Pearson came in with mail which included a fifteen page letter from Dorothy, pledging her closest support and cooperation. This was most cheering, but of course I had fallen entirely in love with her from the moment of our first meeting at the Colony Club in New York, a great woman.

Pearson took me over to see the member of the Tagore family he calls 'Maharajah Sahib', Dwipendranath Tagore, or Dipu Babu. He was very much of a personality, packed full of humour about the strange goings on in this world and with apparent contempt for what would happen to him in the next. For Andrews he obviously has a profound respect but not nearly so much for Gandhiji. 'Gandhiji', he says, 'accused me that my indigestion was most certainly due to my secret sin, though in reality it had arisen from drinking milk.' He had therefore heard with no little interest that Gandhi was now down with an attack of dysentery. 'I have', he said, 'sent a message to Gandhiji asking him to search his conscience deeply in order to discover his own secret sin. Probably it is nothing more than that goat's milk which Gandhiji is always drinking', he added.

Hearing me mention with approval the qualities of Indian tobacco he ordered a *huqa* (hubble-bubble pipe) to be prepared and lit and brought for me to try. He was obviously somewhat pained and puzzled as he watched my inability to exert enough pull on the mouthpiece to get the pipe to work at all, not realising how well the sucking muscles have to be trained to achieve any positive result. Not only is the tube itself like a long silver snake, but the smoke must be sucked from the burning charcoal down through the tobacco and so into the water-bottle and out through the tube. The process may be much more satisfying, musical and deliciously aromatic than any of the Western processes of taking tobacco, but for

this monstrous suction the muscles must obviously undergo special training.

We left for Pearson's thatched bungalow where we took a late breakfast. His home is very simple. It has charm and a superb view. He has lately bought a cow and has it brought every morning to his house to be milked in front of his very eyes and, says he, he is willing to share what he believes to be a pure and unadulterated supply with me morning and evening.

After lunch Aurobindo Bose came to call on me, a most attractive lad and of the same year as mine at Cambridge. He had been caught in Germany by the war and is a physicist with a special interest in heredity. He had been mentioned as a possible Bengali tutor, but he is off back to Germany immediately.

On my evening walk Gurudev spotted me from his upper chamber and called me to come up to see him. I explored the whole of the ground floor for the staircase not realising that it had been built on later outside the house when the top storey was added. He had, he said, some doubts and anxieties about the names he had understood that I had proposed for a Board of Directors. He wondered whether I had meant to include a lot of British officials. He was nervous lest they would set their heavy hands upon his little institution as they tended to do in so many other things, but especially in the field of education. 'This was not my intention at all', I said. 'The fact is that unless we can prove to the British official world that their present policies are not getting anyone very far I shall feel we shall not have done our duty.' (My anxiety was of course that whenever we use money given from outside India and by people who are not Indian and who do not know India, there should be some independent and competent judgment on the soundness or wisdom of the ways in which we were spending their monies). The Poet seemed quite satisfied and went on to make some most fruitful suggestions. 'The American Consul in Calcutta was', he said, 'a sensible man. Should we agree to have him up after we had made a start?' K. T. Paul,

the head of the Y.M.C.A. in India and a Madrasi, now living in Calcutta, was another name he thought of with approval—‘How about Sir Jagadish Bose, the scientist ? With these as advisers we could make an excellent start.’ I agreed.

‘The students from the College here who insist that they want to join you and to become farmers’ he went on, ‘are ready and eager to begin. They have nothing else to do, for since some of them decided to be non-cooperators, they have been disowned by their parents for leaving the college. The non-cooperation political people will not help them so long as they refuse to go out canvassing for new members. They have already had some touch with the villages and they are willing to turn a hand to anything. They are also of the calibre from which you may one day recruit your staff.’ ‘I have met Dr. Bay’, I said, ‘he might be useful, invaluable in fact.’ ‘Yes’, said Tagore, ‘he could certainly have his laboratory down there with you and live there too. In fact he is something of a genius and eager to be of help.’

After half an hour I left the Poet intending to search for Santosh Majumdar. But I was caught hold of by members of the school and college staff and hailed to a party in honour of Rathi’s birthday. Luckily for me I was given a seat by Santosh. We began immediately to discuss some of the main problems that would face us ; the lack of fodder for livestock ; the prospects for keeping goats for milk as they do in the U.P., or for turkeys, for runner ducks or geese ; the difficulty of finding a cheap mode of fencing, prickly pear perhaps ; or of starting a dairy cooperative. I hope Santosh Majumdar can be persuaded to join us at Surul for he has been working on so many of these problems for years.

I shall have to cable Dorothy tomorrow for \$25,000 to start us on our way. In the background I could hear the Poet talking to someone about the Surul plan and I wonder much what the gossips are saying already.

All kinds of people drop in at the big house where I am at present lodged, on all kinds of pilgrimages. Two Bengalis came in to see me from next door, where sleep pilgrims to the ashram,

established here by the Poet's father in the last century specially as a place for meditation in superb natural surroundings. They proceeded to examine and turn over all my possessions, asking the while every kind of question. One I presented with a novel, to the other a pamphlet on Ireland, and some envelopes. One wanted a shirt, but I excused myself on that score, explaining that it needed to go to the dhobi (laundryman). All very oriental.

Wednesday, November 30, 1921

Up early and ready to attend the chapel just below across the way, since this is the local Sunday¹. Tagore had had a fever in the night and the start was delayed. It was cool and I crept in and sat down on the cold white marble floor, glad that I was well shrouded in an old army blanket. The structure was ordered, I hear, from the firm that built the Crystal Palace in 1851. It is also mainly of glass, some coloured, in cast iron frames, bolted together, and has a tiled roof. In hot weather and during *mandir* (chapel) all the side doors are open and all is cool and light within and with trees on three sides.

It was a simple, peaceful and impressive ceremony. The Poet in his long robe, a pale grey, walked slowly up the steps and took his seat, more or less in the centre, but towards the West end and facing East. The women and girls sat in their shawls on the floor around and behind him, male staff and students in front and the little children just inside the glass doors or on the steps outside but all around. As soon as the singing and recital of Sanskrit texts (mantrams) was over, most of the latter slipped noiselessly away to pursue their own devices.

A mat had been set for the Poet, and in front of the mat sticks of sandalwood incense were burning, which scented the whole building. Tagore's beautifully groomed long grey locks and silvering beard framed the pale brown face and high forehead, always a striking picture but looking in this early morning light a little tired and pathetic. He is already over sixty years

¹ Wednesday is a holiday in Santiniketan and Sriniketan.

of age. His voice in recitation and later in speech was however clear, firm and strong. His intonation of the Sanskrit texts was done with great delicacy of feeling and every word was so clearly enunciated that one felt one could have picked up Bengali quite rapidly if only one could sit continuously and listen to him.

A choir of students, boys and girls sang, everyone sitting then and whilst Tagore spoke. When little boys and girls rose quietly and ran down the steps after singing no heavy hand was raised to compel attendance or devout attention. I was sad to see all the women sitting half outside and behind the Poet, but Pearson told me they prefer it that way and choose to sit there separately of their own accord.

Tagore spoke of different types of attitudes, of those who are so enamoured of their possessions and obsessed by their need and craving for them, of those for whom life is perpetual activity, and who, filled with a boundless and unrestful energy, are always engaged in business or some kind or other, and those who manage to avoid total immersion in the one or the other and can step outside from both from time to time in objective detachment. We all need to use both goods, energy and time with discretion and with an eye always on more distant and less immediate goals. With his reason and his emotions each one of us should aim to consummate his life in the pursuit of a higher ideal. This at least was Pearson's rough translation to me from his knowledge of Bengali.

Changing quickly into khaki shorts, shirt and tough shoes I joined Santosh Majumdar for a thorough inspection of his farm. Together we went over all his cattle and cow houses. We discussed the ravages by white ants of timber in buildings. Once again we turned to the main problem, fodder and fodder storage, deep ploughing, manuring and trenching. He told me how necessary it was, before planting *gram* (a small edible pea), to see that the soil was inoculated with the right bacteria. He had, he said, found that the local farmers always brought soil from a plot where *gram* had just been harvested and sprinkled it on any new plot that they were about to sow. We walked

on from his farm to a neighbouring village and sat down to talk to one of the local cultivators, whilst the man's wife went on quietly splitting up a bamboo into strips and weaving them into a tray which she could use for winnowing husked rice. This basket making is a highly skilled craft.

The bamboo is split down with a knife until it is in the form of thin tape. It is then roasted and soaked alternately until it is pliable and leathery. The leaves and stalks from the palmyra palm (*tal gach*) are also used in the same way.

We then called on Atabuddi, a Muslim farmer. He was out in his fields but when he saw us in the distance he started running and arrived quite breathless. He is nearing his sixty-eighth year. He started off immediately by abusing his family. 'I knew they would not give you proper entertainment. They would forget to give you stools (*mora*) to sit on.' With well merited pride he showed us around, clearing his womenfolk out of sight in order to do it.

He had in his yard three *golas* (storage towers for rice), raised on supports and in case the stores proved not to be rat proof he kept his cats under the *gola*. Around the eaves he had hung cans and pots for housing his pigeons' nests. He also kept chickens and ducks and had had to build a hen-house or roosting shed for them. He husked his rice with the help of a long beam hinged at the balance, so that a man could step on one end with one foot, raise the little hammer at the other end, feed into the socket with a long bamboo wand a dribble of so many grains of rice at a time, release his foot and literally hammer the husks off the rice when the hammer dropped into the socket. The hammer has to fall three times on each gulp of rice before the husking is finished. The threshing of the grain from the stalk is done by two men beating a sheaf at a time against a round board tilted upwards on a support like an archery target. In ten beats a sheaf will shed all its rice grains. The two men work with a kind of rhythmic motion and quite rapidly. The unhusked grains then go through a long cooking process before the husking takes place.

Mr Atabuddi not only operated a brick kiln of his own

but did a lot of carting on contract as well. When he heard that I had travelled out on a ship with Pearson I seemed to go way up in his estimation. 'There is no man like Pearson Sahib,' he said. 'One day,' I suggested, 'you should come and talk to our boys of your experience as a farmer.' 'I await your *huqm* (order)' he said. 'I have always tried to be strictly honest in my dealings. I find that it pays. To this fact I impute my success or any wealth that I may have earned.' As we walked away he showed us one example of the worst weed pests in his rice fields, a bearded throw-back from the cultivated rice. Its seed time coincides with reaping time for the cultivated rice. So it sheds its seed as it falls to the ground with the mown rice. A second crop after the rice might cure this trouble and clean the soil, if only there was sufficient moisture still left in the soil and if there was a modern plough with sufficient power behind it to break the crust of this type of soil after the rains are over and the harvest is in.

After lunch and rest Santosh Majumdar, Rathi and Gora (Gour Gopal Ghosh) came up to my room and we tried to set out a workable sort of programme. It was good fun.

There was no need to worry about their response or the agility of their minds. I handed Santosh the list of books and equipment purchased in Ithaca and now on their way out. He was apparently as moved as an Indian can get. 'You must have been thinking out your plans over a long period,' he said, 'this comes as a great inspiration to me.' Little did he realise how nearly I was feeling that one of the dreams of my life might be on the verge of realisation. We discussed a name for the institution. 'School of Agriculture' was suggested, Chancellor : Dr Rabindranath Tagore, Executive Committee : Santosh Majumdar, Rathi Tagore, Gour Gopal Ghosh and self. We thought of adding Mr Roy and others, but decided to keep this committee as small and as effective as possible. I was entitled Director. We are to go down to Surul together tomorrow and to discuss on the site the prospect for fitting up the place and for moving into residence with the students.

As soon as our school is established we agreed that the follow-

ing might be invited to become Trustees : Sir P. C. Roy, the most celebrated chemist in Bengal, Sir Jagadish Bose, physicist in Calcutta, K. T. Paul, B. N. Seal, Dr Liberty Hyde Bailey of Cornell and Sir Michael Sadler, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University.

We decided to offer major and minor projects for each student to work on and to try and establish cooperation among the local farmers in buying, selling and for credit.

Hurried out at 5. p.m. for my first game of cricket, but the boys had not returned from their picnic so we all went round to the tennis court and played till it was dark.

After supper Pearson and I called on his friend Dipu Babu, Tagore's nephew. He was as bursting with puns, jokes and good humour as ever. Then whilst my *huqa* was being prepared (it seems to require one servant almost full time to keep a row of *huqas* in good working condition and ready for service at a moment's notice), we paid a call next door on Dipu Babu's father, the most celebrated, next to the Poet, of all the Maharshi's sons still alive, his eldest son, Dwijendranath Tagore, a man of eighty, frail, toothless and white haired, but still handsome and quite delicately beautiful and distinguished in his old age. He welcomed me with warmth, said he had heard of the plan for a new school at Surul, urged a policy of 'go slow' at the start, and hoped I would find a chance to come back and see him now and then. Andrews goes regularly to talk to him of an evening I gather. A tame squirrel came and took nuts from his hand while we talked.

I returned to Dipu Babu and succeeded, to his delight and applause, in getting a better and longer pull out of the *huqa*.

Thursday, December 1, 1921

My milk arrived at 6.45 a.m. this morning, hot from Pearson's cow, and delicious. *Chhota hazri* followed, then rose, and squatting on my low square marble table took my bath, wielding my brass mug dipper and working from one bucket of hot and one of cold water. Stared work feeling as fit as a fiddle, whatever that implies. Pearson had arranged with the

wife of his friend Dipu Babu, called Baroma, to teach me Bengali.

A small boy arrived to lead me to her house. Baroma is, I am told, a talented author in her own right, both of poetry and of short stories in Bengali. Her enunciation of English or of Bengali is crystal clear. We settled down happily. Dipu babu, her husband, greeted me as I went by. Pearson says my attempt with the *huqa* has already lodged me in his good books.

Baroma told Pearson after the first lesson that with concentrated work for two months I should master the elements of Bengali, since I had already made good progress. But, sad to say, there are other and diverting enterprises on hand. Baroma asked her servant to bring in a certain vegetable to illustrate one of the sentences on which we were working—the direct method with a vengeance. Her false teeth are not really a very good fit and tend to bob up and down as she talks in a rather disconcerting manner. But she is a great personality and with something, I suspect, of saintliness about her character.

The Government's District Agricultural Officer, a young Muslim, called on me today. We had a useful discussion together. Islam Wahed is his name. He says he wants to work in with us all the way. This could be useful, if his department permits.

The car arrived and with Rathi, Gora and Santosh we drove to Surul and considered first of all the furnishing of the place. Much, I see, is going to depend upon the water supply. Chakravarty, the well digging engineer I met in America, should be helpful here. I was struck by the possibilities for the keeping of poultry and perhaps of runner ducks. On our return Rathi retired with an attack of fever and dysentery. In spite of the almost ideal climate and weather here in December there seems to be a kind of running incidence of trouble that affects almost everyone. It is either a bug in the blood and a fever or a running disorder in the bowels, due perhaps to primitive forms of sanitation prevalent everywhere. I see in the early hours boys, younger and older, walking off into the desert wastes

which stretch for miles to the north, north-west and east, each with a little *lota* (brass vessel) and I realise what this can mean in fly-infected kitchen and food so quickly in return. I learned that some 200 members of the Ashram walk out as far as a quarter of a mile every morning into the neighbouring *khwoi*-lands and desert to make their morning's offering, a scandalous state of affairs.

People seem to think that there will be strong objections at Surul to my suggested trenching method.

Cricket was on after tea, but an odd kind of a knock-up with far too many watching and far too few involved. A few of the boys attached themselves to me informally afterwards and came back to look at pictures or just to chat. Today Bishwanath and Tan Seyn came in, the latter from Burma, and a painter of note in the Art School. Tan Seyn wants to take me to visit the Art School tomorrow. A man named Rao joined us for supper and we discussed different methods of teaching English. Pearson's guavas and Indian sweetmeats were excellent.

Across the road from Pearson's were living Professor Sylvain Lévy of the Sorbonne and his charming wife. He is a specialist in Buddhist and Chinese studies. I decided to pay a polite call. They gave me an effusive welcome. 'Yes', said Madame, 'you must let me teach you French and we'll read these French books together.' 'Why, how young he looks !' she exclaimed. 'He can't be more than 25. Ah, but what a future such a young man can have !' Some young Buddhist priests had come up from Ceylon to Santiniketan to study. The professor expressed himself as in despair over what must be the very low standard of education in Ceylon. 'Come and see us again', they urged.

Each evening at Santiniketan in the light of the stars, the student choir for the time being walks round under the mango trees singing some Bengali chant or a song of Tagore. The sound is intriguing but it is also a signal for the immediate closing down of the engine that gives us electric light.

I keep wondering why Bengal never adopted the bullock-driven self-emptying leather bucket that is used at the well



L. K. Elmhirst as The Plowman

and for irrigation from the very deep wells in the United Provinces and around Poona in the Maharatta country. Is there going to be enough water in our well ?

Friday, December 2, 1921

Pearson tells me his single cow with one man to tend it is costing him each month half his own month's salary, i.e. Rs. 45. The amount of milk, he says, tends to vary according to how much goes to the calf and how much to the cowman and his family. This must be one of the smallest dairy businesses ever, but it is the milk fresh from his cow that seems to keep Pearson alive and well.

I have acquired a servant, by name Ranu Govinda Singh, but on a temporary base. He is not a good cook but what is worse we have failed so far to understand each other very well in any language, and even my cup of tea failed to show up this afternoon.

Tan Seyn called in this evening and presented me with a painting of elephants and one of a rhino in the jungle. He has informed the Art School that I also paint. 'I would like to come and learn from you at Surul,' he said. He looks tough and athletic. 'If the College and your guardians agree and you are ready to join us when we open, you shall,' I answered.

Baroma went into ecstasies this morning over my attempt at writing Bengali script. '*Khub bhalo*' (very good), she pronounced. She went on to tell me of what wonderful language she thought was in the New Testament, Authorised Version. 'Neither your modern English nor your Christianity seems to me to measure up to what's there,' she added.

After my lesson I joined Rathi and together we examined the rough shed put up to house Dr Bay's new laboratory, a very '*katchha*' (poor quality) mud building and I realised in what expense we shall be involved to get what we want at Surul. We shall need all the money I have cabled for and more before we can get under way. 'Would it be a good idea some time soon to ask Gurudev to talk to our Executive and then to our future student volunteers ?' I asked Rathi.

My siesta over, Dr Bay and I set out across the paddy stubbles to Surul. The old engine erecting shed, now unroofed, but well pillared, could be converted into a cow-house or dairy barn with little cost. The tank or pond excavated close by could be filled quite simply during the rains by the cutting of a channel in the bank at the N. W. corner. We might use it as a bathing pool too once we have trimmed the banks.

The farm manager at present in charge at Surul is Santosh Mitra. He is devoted to his farm but has the reputation of having been at school a sensitive and a gifted art student. He does not seem to be afraid of putting his hand to any job that needs doing. He has a most winning smile. He gave me raw *khejur ras* (date-palm tree juice) to drink just extracted from a date-palm. When left to ferment this juice makes quite a powerful liquor. Santosh asked how soon would I be coming into residence. He was, he said, delighted to feel that someone was coming with whom he could collaborate.

To Dipu Babu, and as I approached the house his distinguished musician son, Dinu, was just about to leave. 'Do not think', he called, 'that the moon is flying away at the approach of the sun' as he left us together. We discussed farming problems and the kind of trouble that would face us. Our *huqas* bubble in chorus now and my pulling powers are steadily improving. On my coming visit to Allahabad I told him I hoped to pick up a young buffalo bull, a Multani bull, a bunch of heifers, all of good milk giving strains and to travel back with them. I expect to go to learn something about bees, to Naini to discuss farm implements, to Lucknow to see a commercial chicken farm, to Gwalior and to Poona to learn about pasture problems. 'When Rathi,' said Dipu, 'went to the headquarters of the Geological Survey in Calcutta and asked to see any geological or soil maps they had of this area that would give him even a rough idea of what he might expect to run into when well-boring, they kept him waiting three hours and then told him that the only information they could give him about geology in the Birbhum District was about minerals. Is that what they tax us for?'

What do we see for it all ?' 'Nothing' was his final comment.

Saturday, December 3, 1921

Andrews arrived back at 8.00 this morning and was cheered lustily for some minutes by the whole school and college. He is somewhat heavy in build, with fine eyes and a good nose and forehead. His burly black beard hides the rest. The combination of parson's cassock with topi gives rather an odd effect, but from the few words I have heard him utter he strikes me as a man with some magnetic power. He certainly has the courage with which to defy the powers that be, in state, church or empire. I have yet to see that impractical side of his character of which both Curtis and Gourlay have spoken.

For an Englishman the central and dental t's and d's in Bengali are difficult enough, but the nasal sounds I found less of a problem. I must try my hand at reading Bengali script.

Tan Seyn came over to conduct me on a tour round the Art School. He is the bright kind of lad we ought to be able to attract. He has already run a tractor and helped on his father's rubber estate and rice fields. He says he is determined to come to Surul and to join us there. I asked Rathi about him. 'You'll have a tough time with him', he said, 'but he's got first-rate stuff in him. He can get up to mischief.' I doubt whether he'd have much interest left for getting up to mischief after we get down to business. I hope to get a frame for Tan Seyn's elephant picture and to hang it in my room.

At Christmas time it is customary for students and staff at the Art School to paint or draw or decorate plain postal cards and to sell them at the *Mela* (fair). I picked out four of theirs and contributed four of mine. 'In this one', criticised Tan Seyn, 'the sea is too dark, and this bird's beak needs to be brightened with a touch of yellow, but why don't you come out painting with me one day and work on a much larger scale ?'

To Madame Lévy I am now Monsieur Léonard. Dr Bay is all against my eating eggs. 'But', said I, 'my eggs are going to be infertile eggs so no life principle will be at stake,'

thinking that he must have some special Buddhist or Jain objection to tampering with or not respecting life. 'But', Dr Bay protested, 'the trouble with eggs is that they tend to create and to promote puissance.' 'Puissance', I said, 'puissance, I don't get what you mean.' 'Why', said he, 'sexual power of course. Didn't you know that it was immensely stimulated by eating eggs?' I said I wondered wherever he had picked up such an idea.

What will the Poet say to the suggestion that we might keep pigs and turkeys? The old Maharshi, who laid it down that no flesh must be consumed inside the ashram compound at Santiniketan would probably turn in his grave at the very idea.

In a meeting this evening where we tackled the budget for the next twelve months using our \$ 25,000 as a base, we left out of account the Rs. 30,000 we need immediately for land acquisition. We decided to use a part of our first grant for this purpose and to put in a supplementary request later to cover the deficit on our running cost as soon as we can estimate it, acting on the supposition that further monies will be forthcoming. The land immediately outside our gate belongs to a local temple and could, I gather, be converted into a playground without cost.

For a year the non-cooperation students from Santiniketan worked in the village of Surul. They left behind them quite a good school building which may prove useful. At the end of the meeting Rathi suddenly burst out, 'I can hardly believe that our dream, so many years old now, might really come true.' 'Why', added Gora Babu, 'think of what this enterprise might mean for India as well'. I did not mention certain pages in the Calcutta University Report.

The Calcutta University Commission was led by Sir Michael Sadler as Chairman during 1917-18. Under the heading 'Higginbottom' in the evidence is a plan just such as ours today for Surul. This plan was drafted by me for Higginbottom when we were living together in Gwalior. I had typed it out for him one Sunday morning and it was agreed to by him when he was too busy even to edit it.

Madame Lévy has now re-christened me Monsieur le Professeur. She insists that if only she had had a daughter she would have compelled her to accept me for her son-in-law. When she told Mr Bay she had heard that I had once planned to be a parson, he had answered, 'Ah ! that explains his régarde spirituelle !'

Sunday, December 4, 1921

At 5.30 a.m. the Ashram bell began to clang, a harsh and ear-splitting sound but needed apparently for the extraction of small children from their slumbers. It was still dark. I waited eagerly for the final crash and then dozed off again until, with the first sign of dawn, the *kokil* bird utters his strange call from up in the evergreen trees just outside my room. There are I suspect four of these *kokils*. Each one has his own pet perch, but the same senior bird from his same perch always seems to give the same clarion call that heralds the coming of the dawn before any real sign of the dawn is apparent to the human eye. His is the deepest note of the four and precedes by some minutes the sound of the first cock crow. The other three of the troupe follow on up the scale as soon as the leader has finished. The last specialises in a kind of treble pipe when tenor and alto have completed theirs. The tenor also has a good range and a clear call. But the poor alto can never reach the higher notes he is after and fails miserably. The anthem is repeated over again once more from tree to tree, then silence falls. By this time the Ashram itself is beginning to come alive and to hum with boys' voices.

At 6.30 I rise from my camp bed, wind my well travelled army blanket around me and tackle the Bengali script. Pearson's servant appears with my glass of expensive warm milk fresh from Pearson's expensive cow. At 7.30 my *chhota hazri* appears, and on the tray a dirty teapot and a tin cup, both, I suspect, regarded as suitable for pilgrims to the Maharshi's shrine. I am served in silence. Fortunately there is no need to speak, for we cannot converse. I despatch my servant with his easily earned Rs. 10 note. At eight appears my *garam jol*

(hot water) in a *balti* (brass bucket). I pass to the bathroom where from an enamel ladle, after a visit to the thunder box, I douse my squatting form. Dressing is a simple matter, no tie or socks required, only a white shirt pendant over white trousers or blue shorts, sandals on the feet and all is done. After a moment for a rubbing up of the Bengali script I sally forth across the Ashram to the home of my teacher Baroma. Salutations to students are made on the way, with a special bow for Dipu Babu as I enter his courtyard. 'It is market day today', says his wife Baroma, 'and I am very busy. Can you wait five minutes ?' A wonderful chattering goes on and is, I gather, repeated twice every week each market day. This is a vital part of every Indian housewife's weekly ritual. Meanwhile I start a pencil sketch of the courtyard until my teacher is available. She tells me that after seven days I can now read all but the combination signs, and goes into raptures over my progress. I gather she regards herself as one of the chief news-bureaux of the ashram. She has the reputation too of not being an unkind one.

By the end of an hour I was quite exhausted. Too late up last night, too early a start this morning. I called in at the Poet's corner on my way back but could see no one there. Then I ran into Santosh Majumdar and went over with him all the points that were raised in the meeting last night. What a gentle person he is ! Land, he thinks, should be purchased right away, as rapidly as possible. 'We have visited Surul too often already', he said, 'by our obvious interest in it we have sent the price soaring for every square yard around the farm.' After much further and very pleasurable discussion we went to look for the Poet.

There he was lying stretched out on a couch looking delightfully patriarchal and seemingly in excellent humour. We went over our plan as far as we had agreed to it in committee. I dared to prophesy that our student *chashas* (farmers) might one day perhaps put up a winning team against any of his Ashram teams. We shall see. He was entirely sceptical.

The Poet proceeded to give as his opinion that the newly

re-established *panchayats* (committees of five) in the villages under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform scheme, were not likely to work. Although the District Boards, newly established throughout the Province under the same Act and now responsible to an elected Indian Minister and an elected Indian Provincial Legislature, look after health, education and local Government, matters of policing, of tax gathering and of crime, are still the concern of I.C.S. Magistrates, mainly British. Though supposed to go to the elected Indian Chairmen of the new District Boards, the members of village *panchayats* would, the Poet thought still tell all their tales to the I.C.S. Magistrate. He is in fact still the big boss in the background and, like Blackwood, our own I.C.S. Collector and Magistrate at Suri for this District of Birbhum, is not at all anxious to shed his old power or to prove that democracy can work. Having no experience of how democracy could or should work, he can and, in this district, still does take a pride in showing how it does not and cannot work. 'I do believe', said the Poet, 'you could get a really representative *panchayat* to work quite easily if the British really wanted it.'

'I hope', he continued, 'you will establish an annual *Mela* (fair) of your own at Surul and encourage the holding of lantern lectures and of games during it as well as the usual dramas and dances.' He promised to write to the Indian Trustees we had agreed to appoint and said that when next he went to visit his family estates in Patisar, he would like to take me with him and introduce me to his villages there.

So to bath and a late breakfast, with an excellent appetite. Tagore had told me that the Bishop of Assam, the Rt. Rev. Pakenham Walsh, was visiting Santiniketan and had asked to see me. I found him with his wife upstairs at the other end of the same building I lodge in. Spare and lean, with that kind of hungry look that some hard working Anglican priests develop, he proved to be human withal and full of sound sense.

After a siesta I went to Sylvain Lévy's lecture. 'In an effort to master his subject,' he explained, "he had had to become

reasonably proficient in the following languages : Japanese, Chinese, Singalese, Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Bengali.' He proposes in his lectures to deal with the study of the different sources in each of these languages. No one, I gather, from Calcutta University has troubled to come up to Santiniketan to attend this course, though it would surely be a wonderful chance for them, since the professor has a considerable reputation throughout Europe as an Indo-Sinologist. For an ignoramus like myself most of what he said went well over my head, but now and then I would grasp some enlightening bit of history and get a sense of the way in which ideas from India in times far past moved up and over the Himalayas and across the deserts of Central Asia, and, subject to every kind of peril, down into China, west, south and north, thence up into Korea and over to Japan.

The Bishop and his wife had asked me to tea. Afterwards we walked across the rice stubbles towards Mr Cheap's ruined house, north of the village of Surul. There stands the old Residency of the 18th century East India Company Collector. It is completely in ruins and surrounded with a jungle of teak trees and thorns. You can recognise among the ruins his house, his servants quarters and his elephant stables. I think we should be able to acquire it at quite a reasonable figure because the whole area is producing nothing at present except fodder for goats and some firewood.

South of Cheap's *Kothi* (house) is quite an extensive mango grove or orchard, but without any sign of a well or tank from which water must have had to be drawn to get the trees established. On each side there are acres of uncultivated and over-grazed level upland which only await a tractor to be turned into a good fodder-growing farm. The land to the north of the *Kothi* is all heavily eroded and gullied. These red gravel waste lands drop rapidly away and down to the river Kopai.

I feel very like Naboth in the story of Ahab in the Old Testament whose vineyard was so coveted by the King that the latter by every illegal means had to set to work some-

how to remove Naboth, the owner, from the scene. As I stood there I realised there were plenty of Naboth's vineyards to be coveted in almost every direction, hemming us in on every side and the little farm plot at Surul as well. We called on Santosh Mitra, the farmer in charge. He showed us the building which he hopes to see roofed and turned into a home for his wife and family, now a cattle shed, but with a good solid floor. We walked home in the dark comparing our respective agricultural plans. On our return the boys formed a circle around us and sang to us their school song ending impressively with *Om, Shanti, Shanti* (peace), *Om*.

On to Pearson's for supper. Asit Haldar was there and the librarian, Atul Chauru and Tan Seyn as well. Much of the talking and joking was in Bengali, but it was good fun. Home by 8.00 p.m. and to letters, diary and bed. 'Are you happy here?' ask the students. 'Do you like this place?' 'As happy as a King', I answer. Perhaps it should be as a Maharajah. A student turned up today from Mysore. He says he has come to know whether he can work his way at Surul. He swears he is ready to put his hand to anything.

Monday, December 5, 1921

Really tired this night. After an hour of study at home, another with my teacher Baroma. We digressed in the middle into a discussion about the English language but made fair progress. Later to Rathi and a talk with Santosh Mitra about the farm. The camera has arrived, an Auto Graflex with which I practised at Woods Hole last September. To the library till lunch and then the student from Mysore turned up once again asking for a job. Santosh Majumdar said that since we knew nothing about him we must not risk taking him into the group at the beginning. I told him he had better come back in three months' time. Then thinking he might be in a fix and that he really seemed to want to put his hands to active use, I suggested he should be employed on trial on the farm for two weeks by Santosh Mitra. Rathi agreed.

More Bengali and then two students came to haul me off for a game of football. The boys play well and with lots of spirit. My legs behaved reasonably well and I learned a few new Bengali words. To Pearson for supper. The Poet's grandson was there, Nitu, serious, handsome, with something of Tagore's grace and serenity of countenance. He is the son of Nagen Ganguli, whom I met in Calcutta and who seems to have fallen out with everyone here to such a degree that he has retired altogether to Behala. He seems to have been rather a temperamental person, but he backed Pearson in his fight to get something serious done about the sanitation of the Ashram. The 200 who still, I gather, wander off every morning into the wide open spaces to make their offering to nature, fail to obey the command of Moses recorded in the Old Testament, 'always to take with them a little 'paddle', or spade.

To the Art bungalow after a hurried supper, and there a group of thirty was awaiting me. Andrews and the Bishop and his wife joined us. I tried in fifteen minutes to describe what I hoped we might be able to do at Surul. I did not realise at the time that there were two men there who had apparently made a very thorough study of the villages around Surul. The Bishop spoke too and congratulated me afterwards. 'This', he said. 'is likely to prove a most interesting and even a fascinating experiment.' Then up came a man who said he had been working in the villages for eight months, but without any encouragement. I took down everything he could tell me. Andrews asked me questions about fodder for the cows and about silage, and later told me how delighted they were and how it had put new life into those who had already thrown up their political activities and their campaign for non-cooperation, completely discouraged. He added that some of them, he thought, would like to sign on again to this new programme at Surul. 'What about spinning?' asked Andrews. Andrews and one of these village workers both seemed warmly in favour of hand spinning, which is to play such a major role in Gandhi's programme, but I could not get from them any clear answer to the question: 'Do you

favour spinning as a road to the economic revival of the village or simply because Mr Gandhi wants everyone to spin as a protest symbol against the British Government and against the importation of foreign cloth from Manchester, made out of Indian grown cotton ?' A good hand-spinner might spin enough yarn to earn three to four *annas* (pennies) a day, that is, about eight cents. Weaving by hand-loom, especially of saris with special border patterns, can still be quite reasonably profitable but it seems madness to me to fly or to spin, in the teeth of economic laws. A very few modern spinning machines could keep all the weavers in all the villages in this area supplied with a strong, even and well spun yarn. But the yarn from amateur spinners is bound to be of a low standard and the process is not only quite laborious but wholly unprofitable. 'The village women', said Andrews, 'have nothing much they can do to earn cash during all but four months in the year, and the men are only busy on the land for four months in the year. They both need some new kind of economic occupation especially for the hot summer months.' Andrews then drew a terrifying picture of conditions throughout West Bengal. Rathi told me that two of the men who spoke were somewhat politically inclined. This I had begun to suspect, but it was most useful to have Rathi's frank opinion.

'If I had you as my pupil for two years I would have you talking better Bengali than any Englishman now in Bengal', said Baroma today.

Pearson tells me that while he was travelling with the Poet and acting as his secretary, he was now and then put into some embarrassment. Gurudev wanted in theory to live in the style and in the homes of the people of the land. But he was sometimes terribly nervous about their methods of sanitation. So Pearson bought him a superb portable commode complete with plug and water apparatus. The whole was enclosed in a discreet green canvas bag. He wanted to have Tagore's initials put on the bag. The Poet refused. At one place this green canvas bag was standing outside the Poet's door when two gentlemen arrived to see him. Having come to worship at his

feet, they enquired on departing, what was contained in the large green package. 'Tagore's poems' Pearson whispered. The two gentlemen bowed their heads almost to the ground in respectful salutation. Pearson had just told this story to Dipu Babu, who appreciated it immensely. He was so tickled in fact at the idea of this salutation that he threatened to publish the story all around the Ashram, much to Pearson's anxiety, and for fear that it might get back to the Poet's ears.

Thursday, December 8, 1921

On Tuesday I went to Surul. Rajalakshman Rao was there looking very disconsolate. I gave him one end of the measuring tape and we proceeded to measure up the new cow-house. Then Santosh Mitra appeared and got us a *kodal* (digging implement). I broke the first sod for the start of our trenching system. Rajalakshman stood puzzled. 'In my country (Mysore) the Government pays coolies to dig,' he said. When I told this story to Mr Sheppard, the Principal of Sabour Agricultural College, he said, 'Did you smack his head?' This illustrates the hopeless lack of imagination of the average British Civil Servant, and a Trinity Cambridge man to boot. I told Santosh Mitra to give Rajalakshman the *kodal* and a trench to dig and to encourage him to fill it with manure.

The place is now beginning to take shape in one's mind. On return to Santiniketan I found that Dasgupta of the Bengal Agricultural Ministry and Chakravarty, the water engineer, had arrived. I was delighted to see the latter again. I had said goodbye to him in New York a year ago.

I sat down with Dasgupta to try and find out what help, if any, we were likely to get from the government agricultural people. (Owing to the partition of Bengal, under Curzon as Viceroy, the Bengal Agricultural College at Sabour, beautifully equipped and fully staffed, thanks to Gourlay, then responsible in Bengal for Agriculture, had been handed over lock, stock and barrel to the government of Bihar. Bengal was therefore short of any institution for agricultural training and research, at college or university level, at a time

when its main income still came from agricultural produce, jute, sugar-cane and rice).

‘The government of Bengal should,’ said Dasgupta, ‘establish a farm here and hand it over to you, but anyhow we should be able to send you seed and implements, and I would like to come up here, regularly, once a week, if you want me.’ He seemed delighted with our plans.

Chakravarty had postponed his departure and took me out for a walk. He promised, however, that he would bore for us at Surul the first well. I knew we’d be hamstrung without an ample water supply. (It was years later that a competent firm of engineers came in and, boring far deeper and with more efficient drills than Chakravarty had available, found an ample supply at Santiniketan. Years later too came irrigation water from the Dumka Hills).

‘Don’t, whatever you do, dig yourself in here,’ was Chakravarty’s practical advice. ‘In a very few years you should have established here a test case, and then you must be up and out on behalf of our great cosmopolitan effort. It has got to come and you have to take the lead in it. This show must prove a success. Take up no business enterprise here that will not show a decent return and for heaven’s sake make no mistakes with the villagers. No one in India yet at all understands what real experimentation means, what project to choose, how to set it up, or how to measure the results. If they see the slightest sign of failure, they throw up their hands in despair and give up hope.’ (He might have added that in the case of British qualified researchers it was more vital for them to get their results published for home consumption than to render any special service on the farm or immediate solution to benefit India. Only now and then could Indian research men resist a similar tendency and pressure).

‘I had in my engineering business to get rid of all my family members altogether. After the failure of the first well boring they thought that I’d never overcome the effect of sand blowing in Bengal, the result of the ebb and flow of sand in old river beds. I got down to work on my own and

solved the problem. I have brought back a small tractor suited to working in paddy fields, and an improved spinning wheel as well, in readiness, and I hope before long to have my own experimental farm.' As he bid me goodbye he said sadly that his very orthodox family refused to feed with him any more, because he had been abroad and had broken their caste rules and restrictions, so that now he had to live apart. He had given up hope of ever being able to get his girl friend out from America or of ever marrying her.

Santosh Mitra brought round his bullock *ghari* (cart or carriage, cart in this case, without springs) and we jolted and rumbled down to Bolpur station to catch the train going North. At 6 a.m. we arrived at Sabour station and spent the day there looking over Bengal's lost College of Agriculture. Of all the colossal wastes, this seems to me to be for the India of today, one of the most sizable. Equipment marvellous, everything laid on for teaching the main sciences, a botanical garden, lovely grounds, a fully trained and qualified staff, with an English civil servant, Sherrard, at the head. But all the staff were disgruntled and were hopelessly fighting each other's schemes or making criticisms of one another. There were six Cornell-trained Indians there! All were busy trying to live up to their salaries in semi-Indian, semi-European style. Mr Seal was outstanding and a great help to me. He was very much on the job and told me to look out for Santosh Bose as one of the brightest of his former students and now in the service of the Bengal Government. The rest seemed to be mainly concerned with pursuing their pet hobbies. One said to me 'Cotton is the thing today.' Another, 'The future lies with sugar-cane.' Another was busy promoting the growing of tobacco. None seemed inspired by the opportunities now in front of them and there was neither an agricultural economist in sight, nor what in America they would have called an agronomist.

On my return I had a long talk with Tagore. He was walking across the school grounds in his long robe and looking very picturesque. All the little kids dropped their bats and

stopped their games and came running to him quite naturally to take the dust from his feet. Laying a gentle hand on each of their heads he passes on.

During their play hour at night, I am told, he will go up into their dormitory, order the senior staff out and then have great times telling stories to the children.

As I mentioned some of my first impressions, he confirmed my fears. 'Though a zemindar myself,' he said, 'I had to urge my own *ryots* to organise and to strike a blow for themselves. Otherwise there would have been no hope for them. From the outset, remember, you must expect bitter opposition from the local zemindars (landlords) in this area and especially from both the *chhota* and *bara baris* (small and big houses) in Surul. But you are setting out on what can be the noblest of rescue work.'

Wednesday, January 18, 1922

Yesterday I returned from Calcutta having successfully and at last dispelled my old distaste for that cursed city and for its unhappy associations for me out of the past. (In 1916, I had stayed in Park Street awaiting the return from the U.S.A. of Ned Carter, the American Director of the Y.M.C.A., for all India. I had at his request trained myself as a shorthand typist in order to be his personal secretary. He had returned to tell me that he had just been asked to take over command of the Y.M.C.A. in France for the British and American armies and was going to return to Paris and take up his new job immediately. I went down with dengue fever and nearly collapsed altogether in utter desperation and despondency. Later, when convalescent, I had volunteered for further service with the Y.M.C.A. in Iraq. I was accepted and left the sticky heat of Calcutta for Bombay and Basra in the late summer of 1916. On my return from Iraq, ten months later, being invalided out, I resigned for good from the Y.M.C.A. A sudden opportunity occurred to volunteer to work for Lionel Curtis as his private secretary, the man I had been hero-worshipping for months. When I had finished typing out for

him his final draft of *Dyarchy for India*, I had, at his suggestion, transferred my services to Sam Higginbottom at Allahabad, and later still, on being classified unfit and given a passage home, I had been advised to tour part of the Deccan with Dr Harold Mann of Poona Agricultural College. I took a boat which, thanks to five attacks by German submarines, spent six weeks at sea before we docked at Tilbury in the spring of 1918).

I shall henceforth be able vividly to recall the beautifully proportioned room where the Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, the Poet's father, lived, worked and wrote his autobiography. It was the door of this room which the child Rabindranath would open and close so stealthily that he might escape completely and for a few hours from the autocratic sway of the family servants.

Each early morning of my stay I would sit by the window, one that the Poet had himself had inserted, so that he too could watch the coming of the dawn over the rooftops to the east, to be followed by the rising of the sun through a rosy haze of city dust.

After a tough day of shopping and meetings I would run upstairs, across the little bridge, tear off my European socks and coat and my well creased flannel pants, don the wide brimmed hat, cotton pajama trousers and the long hanging shirt of the East, cover all with a mantle of wool, not unlike a college gown. Then slipping down on to the raised dais, and propped on one side by a bolster and a cushion, I would look out over the courtyard and listen to the sounds of the busy Chitpore Road, the groaning of its bullocks, the squeaking of cart wheels, the resonance of its brass gongs, and the squealing of the kites. To the west and over the flat roofs, past the black silhouettes of the *tal gach* (palm trees) the sun would suddenly drop out of sight, and scorning our northern twilight, dusk would fall around us like a stone.

Then I would turn to the Autobiography and the Reminiscences whilst the old bearded Maharshi, Tagore's father, looked down upon me from his canvas on the wall, life size.

Here I found deep peace of soul. An utter calm seemed to enshroud me such as I had not really known for seven long years. World War I had snatched me and so many of us out from the peaceful courts of Cambridge and forced us into patterns of life and beastliness we would never have chosen for ourselves. I was at last engaged upon the task I had always longed to take a shot at.

Late at night I would slip out before tucking in the mosquito net on to the flat roof under the stars. The windows of the women's quarters of the artist brothers' mansion across the court were all tight shut. There was on the end of the parapet an old kite (in English, buzzard, but in the East an urban resident) acting kind of sentry man as I would pace up and down in the moonlight, then into the Maharshi's vast curtained bed, a veritable room in its own right.

In the morning, early, one of the three brothers from across the way would come and sit with Rathi and me whilst we took our *chhota hazri* (little breakfast) of tea, buttered toast and *kala* (banana). Then the three of us would descend together, cross the court below and climb past a row of *huqas* (hubble bubble pipes) the teak stairway to the first floor of the artists' mansion. We would steer our way through what seemed like a museum of art treasures, objects d'art and pictures, and so out on to the broad west facing Palladian verandah where the three brothers spent every day the most part of their mornings when in Calcutta.

Immediately to one's left, as we came out on to the broad space, sitting cross-legged on a square stool, would be Abanindranath Tagore, the artist. Always with brush, paints and paper within easy reach and with a large bowl of water at his side, he would carry on his drawing or painting, but never miss the chance to make some salty contribution, humorous or wise, on current political events, the latest news from Santiniketan, or straight family gossip.

Gaganendranath, the eldest brother might or might not be busy painting, but, with a more rippling but no less subtle humour, he would as often as not set the theme around which

the comment would flow. Quietly, and more rarely from the third stool at the far end would come a much more philosophical remark. Samarendranath, the second brother, though not a painter, had, I suspect, by far the most ruminating mind of the three. To the end he would take a broader view of human affairs the world over and express a kindlier view of the faults and foibles of humanity in general. Silent, pensive yet observant, he followed with close attention every step in the Surul enterprise. The *huqas* gurgled away throughout the session, for as soon as it was known that I had adopted at Surul this most civilised, musical and aromatic mode of taking tobacco another *huqa* would be prepared below as soon as I had arrived and set by me for my own special comfort.

Leisured artistry, cultivated philosophy, caustic political comment with a flavour now of idealism, now of scandal, would flow along that verandah where every detail served to satisfy the eye. The brothers' robes, designed like those worn by gentlemen in Sikkim, or in Tibet, and adapted to the Calcutta climate, lent an impression of leisured ease, culture and of tranquillity, that in contrast with the turmoil of the political and business worlds without, left one with an unforgettable sense of ancient India at its traditional best but married to an incredible, and very much of today, urbanity.

On the third and northernmost side of the court flanked by the two Palladian mansions was an ample but hardly aesthetic dwelling of Edwardian red brick. This was let by the Poet to Surendranath, great grandson of Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, and son of Satyendranath, the second of the Poet's elder brothers. Kindly and gentle, almost saintly of character, Suren was a man of such rigid probity that more agile minded Calcutta businessmen were able to ring him around with their development plans, suck his blood and brains and leave him burdened for life, with debts and obligations from which he would never try to, and could not, escape. His struggles to repay anchored him to his office chair when he would have loved nothing better than to have gone to Santiniketan and to have

joined the Poet, his uncle, to help him keep the Santiniketan ship afloat and well served.

There was never an aspect of our venture at Surul that I could not discuss frankly with him and whenever I came to Calcutta we would take a meal together in one of those eighteenth century restaurants, still surviving in Calcutta, where each group is decently screened in privacy behind swinging half-doors. Every detail of our plans and problems was to him of interest. He would enlighten me on the puzzles of village sanitation. 'Coming into Calcutta through the fields and villages by train just after dawn I notice the men squatting anywhere, everywhere on the edge of fields or jungles paying their morning summons from nature, but what about the women?' Suren explained, 'in almost every Bengal village there is a tank (a square or oblong pond or lake artificially dug, the banks held in place by groves of mango or palm trees). There in the very early morning the women proceed to brush their teeth, extract water for drinking and cooking at home for the day, and to bathe and contaminate the water in other ways. Thanks to the strong bactericidal rays of the sun, to the action of the wind and to the natural circulation of the water in a hot climate, the process of destruction of bacteria by oxygenation is incredibly rapid, so that in a tank where one bank is reserved for ablutions, on the opposite side where the drinking water is extracted, there can be an almost septic condition. But this kind of reservation is so seldom made, and you will find that almost every villager suffers some sort of intestinal complaint. This is why when a cholera germ gets loose, so many people catch the infection from the tank before steps can be taken to disinfect it with quicklime.'

It was Suren who was always ready to discuss the application of the cooperative idea. 'We can't afford,' he told me on this visit, 'to have you stuck all your time at Surul. We must have you elsewhere and they must at an early date give you a second in command. Why not Santosh Majumdar?' 'Well,' said Rathi, for we were generally together on these journeys to Calcutta, 'he's been trained for this kind of work.'

I suspect too that he'd not be at all sorry to leave Santiniketan for a little and to move away to Surul with his wife.'

Rathi would put me in the back of his open car between himself and his wife Pratima Devi, gloriously decked out in some tasteful, and not easily to be forgotten, sari. People would in those days stop and stare, from shops and hotel porches or pavements, at this strange sight of an English sahib who seemed to be on such easy terms of acquaintance with an Indian gentleman and his wife. (At the door of the Club in Calcutta which was reserved for British Indian Civil Servant bachelors and visiting Collectors or Judges, even up to the closing day of the war in 1944, no Indian gentleman, even of the I.C.S. was admitted as a member and two Gurkha soldiers kept watch to see that no Indian of whatever official standing, ever came within the portals without a special pass from the Secretary).

Our lorry driver, Alu Roy, is an old Santiniketan student. He enlisted (in World War I) in the Army Transport Corps and, being practical by bent and never academic by nature, could be counted upon to tackle almost any tough job that came along. He had a grin that was so winning that it would get him out of almost any trouble on an ordinary occasion except when his fertile imagination led him well outside society's recognised boundaries.

On Sunday last he was arrested in Calcutta in College Square during a student demonstration. 'We put the whole 2000 of you under arrest,' shouted the police, 'but since we've only room for 32 in our vans, who wants to go ?' The vans were then filled with volunteers and I can't think how Alu even managed to get himself included. Alu had driven lorries on the N.W. Frontier and was never, I suspect, a non-cooperator or a politician at all. Thank goodness, the police seem to be practised now in dealing reasonably with non-violence, but if and when civil disobedience really catches on, as it may now be doing, then we are going to see serious trouble.

Except for Mrs Van Egen, all the people here at Santiniketan from the Poet down the line to Santosh Majumdar and Rathi,

tend to look on me as a kind of infallible expert and perpetual enthusiast. How little they realise of what goes on underneath the skin. Here am I a-shivering on the brink whilst they are all full of confidence and athirst to begin. As I look over the edge, how badly I need a friendly and encouraging hand before making the plunge.

I found Santosh Mitra had never given his little pony a name, the pony he rides so furiously and seems to care for so intermittently. Once give a name to an animal and, whatever it is, you should be likelier than before to have some kindly consideration for it than if you think solely in terms of a scientific analysis of his main characteristics, his weight, his bones, hide, and of the noise he makes. Santosh Mitra was delighted at this, to him, novel idea, but still more with his new saddle and bridle.

Today I had a chat with old Boroda. He is the eldest surviving of the nine Tagore brothers. Boroda must be well over 80 but is still full of acumen and humour. He is devoted to Andrews. 'How much,' he said as I sat down by him, 'we owe to men like you and Pearson and Andrews !' If you can do this one thing at Surul, you will have done something of inestimable value. May I wish you every success. In this political turmoil the world is crying out for peace and cooperation, but how few there are who see their way towards it ? Come and see me when you will. I am old and feeble but I am watching your plan with interest.'

The Poet is not always a philosopher, and sometimes his natural bitterness against certain gross aspects of British imperial behaviour peeps out from under his normal philosophic calm. Among the British in Britain are still some of his very best friends, but as a nation they have never accorded him the kind of public ovations and popular enthusiasms that he met with recently on the Continent of Europe and especially in post-war Germany. I had complained to him that Dr Bentley, chief medical officer to the government of Benga and one of the most devoted and expert of British civil servants, was dubbed a crank in the official drawing rooms

and offices in Calcutta, a kind of pet name the British give to anyone who shows some special enthusiasm about anything. He was therefore shunned in so-called polite society. Yet in the teeth of the sceptics he has fought tooth and nail for a better understanding of the health problems in Bengal. He tries to persuade everyone to adopt a more scientific approach to the appalling problem of sanitation in Calcutta and in rural Bengal. I mentioned, too, to Tagore that at the recent Pusa conference on India's agricultural problems most of the real issues had been shelved in an attempt to satisfy the immediate needs of the big plantation men for tractors, for fertilisers, or for new strains of seed. 'Isn't it extraordinary,' remarked the Poet, 'now if the German mind had been faced with such problems what a different approach there would have been! They'd have brought all their intelligence and thoroughness of approach to bear upon the whole problem.'

In my primitive national English pride I was stung to the quick, but I held my peace and wondered how credible his supposition really was. (For my first months in India in 1915 I had been licensed to service in two internment camps some two thousand Germans with the simple needs they could no longer depend on getting either from Germany or from India. I had come to know the self-segregated groups of missionaries, seamen and merchants. They had never hesitated to tell me just what they thought would happen to our amateur armies in France faced by their professionals, of how German 'Kultur' would and must prevail over the rest of the uncultured world and of how, this time by the Lutheran missionaries, they were going to make quite clear to the Almighty at the last Judgment Day, just what kind of bestial treatment they had experienced at the hand of their fellow British missionaries. Fortunately for me there was in both camps a handful of sensible and educated men with whom I had to deal and to arrange for the bringing in of books, sports equipment and a tree at Christmas. Together we would try to look at some of the problems of the world as a whole and with a little detachment).

'What about sericulture ? Are you going to grow silk ?'

asked the Poet. 'Give us a chance,' I answered, 'please don't expect everything at once. Give us time to survey the local situation. There might be something in your idea and we can't afford to turn down out of hand any industry that could have a sound commercial future in Birbhum. After all the area around Ilambazar was famous once for its lac work. Kalimohan has already discovered that of all the many families once engaged in this industry only four survive and they are almost ready for the burning ghat, but Kalimohan wants to rescue them and to establish the industry. We shall have to see what we can do.' (Kalimohan eventually succeeded in putting the local lac workers back on their economic feet).

Thursday, January 19, 1922

Went over to Boroma for my Bengali lesson this morning, and found that I could read the script with somewhat more facility than I could a week ago.

With Santosh Mitra I went over the farm and calculated the amount of straw we should need to buy for the cows, then set about my accounts.

Pearson showed me a letter from Andrews telling him that the trouble in Malabar is nothing less than a Muslim tenant-rising against their Hindu landlords, a vendetta in part religious, in part economic.

I ran into Madame Sylvain Lévi today. Her keen eye doesn't seem to miss very much of what is going on. 'The trouble is,' she said, 'they are all just too nice here in Santiniketan, and life has really become too easy for them. They have depended upon servants for so long that neither masters nor slaves have retained much of their own independence. The students too are too polite. At home (at the Sorbonne) my husband's best students are accustomed to disagree with him. Here they never raise a question. If someone here stood up and disagreed with Gurudev the world would come to an end, in spite of his real greatness.'

The *mela* held annually at Santiniketan has attracted as many as 80,000 people from the villages around. Since there

is no organised sanitation they all go to the bank of the tank from which they draw their drinking water to relieve the calls of nature. Our students did a fine piece of work and, in spite of some opposition to their determination to protect the one water supply from defilement, were later applauded.

There was a group of Congress followers there raising money for *Swaraj*. Though asked to help in organising the sanitation they refused to lift a finger.

We held a long committee meeting this evening and made good progress.

Friday, January 20, 1922

This being the anniversary of the death of Tagore's father, the Maharshi, there was a memorial service at seven in the morning and a full holiday. As soon as it was over Santosh Majumdar, Suren Tagore up here from Calcutta, Gour, Rathi and I, sat down together to work out the ground plan for our Surul scheme. I ran away for a short Bengali lesson and returned to find an attractive-looking plan already drawn up. There are two main roads, four bungalows for four students each, and four, of two rooms only, for two students each. Each student has one-tenth of an acre to cultivate behind his dwelling. The servants' quarters are also laid out, each with its garden, and the irrigation plan and the site for the dairy are included. The whole looked well and practicable on paper.

At 11 a.m. Rathi and I drove to Bolpur station, unloaded the new Ford truck and drove it in style to Santiniketan. Some kind friend had stolen the seat cushion but otherwise it seemed intact. The school, forgetting their meal, surrounded us and the truck in one triumphant procession.

At least, thought I, the prospective agricultural students will feel that at last here is something tangible. They did. At four o'clock fourteen of us climbed on board, students and committee, and, with our paper, plan, made for Surul.

On the site the plan seemed to work out reasonably well. We found, of course, ample evidence to confirm Dr Bentley's suspicion that we would have an immediate problem with our sanitation.

(The East India Railway which had developed the site back in 1857 had run a branch line out from Bolpur to Surul and had arranged its erection shops in such a way as to cut across the natural drainage and so there were depressions everywhere to suit *anopheles philippinensis*, the carrier of a virulent form of malaria. Calcutta had developed such a bad reputation for malaria in the seventies that the railway authorities, hearing that Surul was a kind of health resort and free of malaria, sent their staff to Surul, and the engine parts as they arrived from England, so that erection could continue without so much depletion of labour from fever. Not knowing the source of infection or the life story of *anopheles*, the local mosquitoes quickly carried the infection from the migrant labour from Calcutta and infected the whole neighbourhood.)

We would need to work out a completely new surface drainage scheme in order to drain off all temporary ponds and pools into the existing tanks where regular treatment with kerosene would stop the mosquito larvae from hatching out.

An Australian Headmistress of a girls' school arrived, a Miss West and we discussed the problem of giving girls some practical training in home-making. 'Our parents certainly don't want their girls trained for a profession,' she said, 'nor would they want their daughters to lose time from a tightly packed curriculum in order to learn to cook, clean, wash or rear children. There are so many more worth-while things to learn.'

I still think we shall need to work out a course for village girls at Surul, and before I leave the whole institution in Indian hands, cookery, sanitation, health measures, mother-craft, appropriate industries, and home-making will all have to be on the curriculum.

On our return from Surul, Santosh Majumdar's wife entertained the Institute Committee plus Kalimohan, with *nimki* and *mishti* (savouries and sweets) and tea out under the stairs.

A discussion started when I suggested that, instead of a seventeen volume report on Calcutta University, perhaps only a charge of dynamite was needed. For such a high percentage

of the total academic output there is, for the present, no room at all in the professions and no demand in the present state of the economy. 'But,' said Kalimohan, 'it is a notable intellectual centre.' 'Yes, but how much of what is taught has any bearing on the social or economic needs of the fifty or so millions of people in Bengal, most of them badly infected with malaria ? Look how the villagers around Surul are dying from malaria, dysentery or cholera !

'With the utmost difficulty we shall find a skilled carpenter or plumber for Surul and we shall have to pay him a sum for which we could hire two or three qualified Calcutta University Masters of Arts. The only outlets left for the energies of these thousands of young unemployed graduates are politics, liquor consumption or brothels. As the practice of non-payment of taxes spreads, the processes of Government, and the financial operation of the University as well will be crippled. Have you considered any method whereby villages singly or in groups could take over the operation of their own affairs ? Of their own taxation ? Of the meeting of their own needs ?

'Suppose that Swaraj suddenly drops upon you before you are ready and before you know where you want to go ? Do your Santiniketan students, who sit meekly at the feet of their teachers, never open their mouths or discuss such vital matters ?

We had a lively discussion.

Saturday, January 21, 1922

My recently engaged servant, Pir Baksh, died. The doctor's verdict was 'from natural causes'. Later he told Pearson that he really had no idea at all what the real cause was, but that if he didn't say 'natural causes' there would be so much trouble that the police would be called in and of course they would want to interfere. It was really much the best thing for him to put in 'natural causes' into his report. Quite probably the patient had overdosed himself with opium. He had notified the man's Muslim community and they had already taken Pir Baksh away for burial.

I had found it difficult in a short two days to make much

human contact at all with Pir Baksh since we neither of us could understand the other one's language. I had not therefore managed to establish any bond at all of mutual understanding or of respect.

Sunday, January 22, 1922

Down to Surul with our new plan and we pegged out the area for the new tank, surveyed the garden and generally agreed upon a policy to be followed.

The sudden arrival of the Ford lorry yesterday has aroused huge excitement at Santiniketan. The stock of the new Agricultural Department has risen accordingly a hundredfold. The lorry is visible, tangible and not incapable either of action or of movement.

Supper tonight was a fascinating meal. Suren Tagore's old mother, the senior lady of the Tagore clan, looking like a dowager duchess, seems still able to keep her ears wide open for any tittle tattle that's about. Boroma, being resident, is able of course to retail to her all the latest news, both talking perfect English.

Rathi Tagore was there and with him his sister, Mira Ganguli and her two children, Buri, active, vivacious, full of fun with a sparkle in the eye and a whole galaxy of dolls. One of these, because it had an outsize paunch, she had nicknamed with the Bengali word for belly. The company was duly shocked. Buri's brother, Nitu, Pearson had told me about. At seven years old he could perfectly impersonate a young princeling as his cousin Manju does a princess. Completely self-possessed grave beyond his years, handsome to a degree, never put out, he carries himself as if he were meant by nature to survey the world of men from a somewhat higher eminence. Something of the quality of his Poet grandfather's voice seems to be his. He has in fact a very sweet and true singing voice. Asit Haldar, the artist, was there too with his son, and Rathi's wife, Pratima, looked after us all. It was a very good meal with much laughter.

It was hard to combine all the practical planning, staffing, equipping and provisoining of a new kind of educa-

tional enterprise and at the same time to break away entirely to make some direct contact with the countryside and its very varied population. Tagore had in New York correctly described Santiniketan to me as being an institution 'almost wholly academic in nature' and so cut off completely from the rural environment in which it was set. Except for the hiring of servants from local villages there was literally no human contact or cultural bridge between the school staff and the citizens of Bolpur, the local town, or the local zemindars. Some kind of bridge had to be made. It is true that Willie Pearson had by his own special efforts won the confidence of the aborigine Santals in their village close by. He had, at his own expense, built a village school for them and staffed it. He had used his own boys to help him make contact with the Santal boys, and had even persuaded the Santals to practise football and so to raise a team of their own. Santosh Mitra, too, through his little farming enterprise and Santosh Majumdar, with his small holding, had both some understanding of the problems of food production in this infertile region. Of other or closer contact between Santiniketan and its environment there seemed to be, as the Poet had said, none at all.

Nandalal Bose, the artist, was forever urging the students in his art school to get out into the streets and the countryside and to sketch people, plants, birds and animals, and the villager at work or at play. 'But,' said he, 'for the most part they much prefer not to move out of the art school studios, and endlessly to repeat drawings of Rama and Sita, or of Sita and Rama.'

This had been Abanindranath's comment to me on the same subject about his own students in Calcutta. Every winter season Nandalal takes all his students, boys and girls, out into camp. They visit some ancient shrine, camp in the forest or by a lake and gather round a fire in the evening for singing or story telling. Nandalal's own studies are full of reminders of the people and villages around Santiniketan. No one seems to have portrayed the Santals as vividly and with such penetration of observation as he has.

Not long after my arrival Tagore had explained to me how, whilst he was absent in Europe and had left Andrews in charge, politics had invaded his ashram and had won many of the staff and students away from education and in the direction of Gandhi's political programme. 'A handful only,' he said, 'has remained loyal to my original plan and ideas and I hope you can make good use of one or two of them since they are not very popular up here any more.' He then introduced me to Kalimohan Ghosh, tall, lean, with a fine romanesque nose, a ready sense of humour and packed with nervous energy.

I must have made a date with him immediately to spend Monday visiting farms and villages within reach on foot in the neighbourhood. No one else had yet suggested to me a visit to a village and this illustrated clearly the statement Tagore had made to me a year ago, 'I have an educational institution which is mainly academic and quite isolated from the villages around, which are in various stages of decay.'

Monday, January 23, 1922

Up at 6 with the dawn and away by cycle to Pearson's for *chhota hazri*. Kalimohan was late, but finally by 7.30 we set off towards the east on foot. At the railway crossing we stopped for a drink of *khejurras*, date-palm tree sap, fresh and cool, but when strained through the donor's *harrum*, or cloth, likely to be dangerous. This is a date-palm juice or sap. The other most common palm is the *tal gachh*, or palmyra palm. Local mythology has it that for fear of evil spirits and infection by leprosy this tree is not tapped for juice. Its leaves are used to make the fire for boiling down the juice from the date-palm into cakes of candy-like sugar, not very different from evaporated sugar—cane juice or *gur*. *Gur* in this district, they say, used to be taken to Mr Cheap, for sale, I imagine, in Calcutta, and possibly for export beyond.

We arrived first at a Santal village in the middle of the *khwoi jami*, the waste lands, of red gravel and rapid erosion.

(These lands were, it was said, covered with forest and jungle like the area that survives between Bolpur and Ilambazar, until

the railroad came through. It then paid the landlords to cut the timber for sale. The jungle was then cleared and levelled for paddy fields, but being infertile reverted to pasture and was overgrazed. Such fertility as had been left by the forest was rapidly exhausted. The land was, under the pressure of the monsoon rains, so quickly eroded that the area became a gullied and hot red gravel desert. The land was good for nothing. The run-off of thin top soil had filled what had hitherto been deep and navigable water channels and left them quite unusable for traffic. In the rainy season, so rapid now was the run-off from the bare uplands that floods remained over the widened river beds eminently suitable for breeding mosquitoes and the spread of malaria.)

The Santals were originally forest and jungle dwellers and hunters rather than cultivators. Forced by the clearing of the jungle to adapt themselves to a new world, whilst clinging to many of their old traditions, they began to hire out their labour for cash to landlords in this area. In return for their labour a landlord would allow them squatting rights on the waste lands and there they erected their own settlements, dug a well and cultivated their own little subsistence plots.

These Santals had just tapped a spring and dug a well, already full of frogs, from which they were drinking. Instead of rent the local landlord demanded free labour from them whenever it suited him. This was generally during the busiest season for them at planting, weeding or harvest time. These simple, cheery people have their own legal code and in case of disputes choose arbitrators from among their own community. They never live close to either a Hindu or a Muslim village or hamlet, but they are eminently exploitable being illiterate.

On the edge of the Hindu village we came to next, were the houses of two of what are called the depressed classes, the Doms and the Haris. During the heyday of Buddhism many peoples in Bengal were converted from Hinduism to the Buddhist faith. As the Hindu priestly caste regained power Buddhists were persecuted and either returned to the Hindu fold as outcaste peoples or, with the Muslim invasions, joined the Muslims

against their Brahmin oppressors and accepted the Muslim faith.

The Doms were originally the most respected group of Buddhists, but once outcasted they have sunk to the borders of untouchability. A Dom priest wrote the Dom Puranas and there is a Dom Puja or form of worship. The Haris were also Buddhists, and both groups today perform some of the most menial services in the village and are, for the most part, landless labourers. They have the reputation of not being strict in their morals and of having an easy mode of divorce. In some villages the Hindu landlords seem to use their women-folk as concubines.

The Muslims are of course much stricter, keep a close watch on their women, who must observe strict purdah, and live in their own villages which are always separated, even if only by a field or two, from the Hindus or Santals.

We arrived at last at the village of Bhuvandanga, after passing by a group of semi-derelict, but at the same time from a scenic point of view beautiful, tanks, each with its own little collection of water-loving birds. They were full of weeds, an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes which require quiet pools without ripple. The few remaining trees on their banks had not been sufficient to prevent steady erosion, so these banks had quietly slipped down and back into the tank again.

This was the fishing season and water was being ladled out of one of the shallower tanks and dropped behind a dam for the irrigation of a winter crop and to make it easier to net what fish had survived.

(Twenty-two years later this village and its tanks were the site of a notable experiment in cooperative fish cultivation in West Bengal. In 1944 I had been invited by Richard Casey, now Lord Casey, then Governor of Bengal, after the great famine, to return to India as his agricultural adviser. Dr Hora of the Zoological Survey of India and I, at his request, were trying to rig up for Bengal a new Department of Fisheries of which Dr Hora was to be appointed Director. One of my original students was by this time, twenty-two years

later, Mayor of Bolpur. He had for some time been head of the Biatibalak work which emanated from Surul, before the Headquarters there was renamed by the Poet, Sriniketan, the Abode of Grace. 'Have you a village in mind,' I asked the Mayor Dhirananda Roy, 'where all the tank owners might agree to pool their tanks in one cooperative ownership and so make possible a really profitable industry in fish cultivation?' 'Yes!' 'Which?' 'Bhuvandanga.'

Dr Hora says he will not visit a village in the Birbhum District and give his professional advice unless there is already a proper plan for cooperative tank management and mutual agreement. All the owners but one had agreed. Dr Hora then decided to come to a meeting in this village and there to settle just which tanks should be used for what function, breeding or growing. He then laid down rules for stocking and management procedure, as well as for manuring and harvesting. A profitable business enterprise grew up.)

The first two men we met in the village were the two leaders. They told Kalimohan that they were agents of the zemindar, or landlord, who lived elsewhere. They were crafty and intelligent looking fellows, Brahmins both, level-headed I should surmise.

The Poet had already warned me that the Brahmins (the priestly caste of Hinduism who are called in to preside at all special feasts or occasions) had at last begun to fall into the same pit into which for so many years they had been pushing everyone else. This verdict seemed to have some bearing on the situation in Bhuvandanga. There had been in this village, the two men told us, 100 families of leading Brahmins, *Kulins*, *Chatterjis* and *Mookherjis*. Today there are only 30 families remaining, including 15 men and 40 women. Fifteen of the latter are widows. Lord Sinha was the original landlord, but now it is the *Suris*. They own the toddy (liquor) shop, and some three to four hundred people assemble there regularly in the evening to drown their fears, suffering, hunger and sorrows. The *Suris* are also bankers and good men of business. Of their five families, two operate the liquor business. Some of the land



Rabindranath and L. K. Elmhirst
in a group at Sriniketan

which they have bought from the other Brahmins they farm themselves and the rest they let out on a crop sharing basis of course, and not for a cash rent. They demand two-thirds of the total crop in lieu of rent. The tenant gets a third. If they lend the tenant bullocks and a plough, they get a third of the straw. If the tenant supplies his own bullocks he gets his third of the straw for himself, but not always a fair third because the landlord takes the crop to his own threshing floor and only returns to the tenant what he, the landlord, thinks is a reasonable share. Since these two men are local money lenders as well, they accept rice as interest, but at the lowest price when the harvest is threshed, demanding not less than a twenty per cent rate of return on their loans and sometimes up to fifty per cent.

One of these Brahmin landlords wanted to know how to cure his potatoes of disease and how to grow them larger in size. When we suggested a night school for the village, he said it would be most unwise. The villagers might come to know too much and would be much less easy to handle. A *pathsala* (day school for children), yes, that would be a different matter altogether. His own children might then be able to benefit.

There were two scarecrows in one of the fields. I found to my surprise that there were human skulls on top of each. Why? 'To frighten thieves away. By the use of skulls these plots became haunted and no one will dare to visit them between dusk and dawn.' The cultivators round here used to harvest raw lac. (An exudation from the bark of the *kul* bush caused by a sap-sucking insect). But the factories they used to supply in Ilambazar are now in ruins and they have forgotten the art of lac cultivation. Down by the river beyond the village were patches of barley, wheat crop and red *dal*, a pea crop.

One of the cultivators told us that his potatoes suffered from attacks by a '*poka*', a boring insect, and that for fertiliser he used old dried cow dung. One of the two headmen promised that, if a *pathsala* were started, he would see that there was enough land alongside to provide for a school garden plot.

Bhuvandanga was really a pathetic sight. So many houses were in semi-decay and obviously needed, where the walls were intact, a new coat of thatch. The one temple was not being repaired. Only around the toddy shop and the village dispensary were there any signs of life. The children were serious of mien, and swollen of belly, intimating the infected and enlarged liver caused by malaria.

On the way home near a settlement of *muchis*, low caste workers in leather, we ran into a party of Muslim Kabuliwallahs, who beat a hasty retreat when they saw us approach. Kalimohan questioned the *muchis* as to what was happening. One of them went into his hut and produced a little cotton jacket and a piece of cheap cotton cloth, once of bright colour. When one of these traders visited this village a year ago he offered to let him have these two articles on credit, provided he would promise to pay them Rs. 4 when they returned this year, since he could not afford the Re. 1½ cash down at the time. But now the trader had returned, with his friends, and was demanding Rs. 12. Some of the neighbours, who also had bought cloth a year ago, hearing the Kabulis were coming, and knowing they had not the money to pay with, had fled into the jungle.

The *muchis* smiled bravely over what they had agreed had been their own folly and admitted that having no money either, they would have to take the beating they knew was in store for them, and, along with it the loss of any removable goods, worth money, in their homes.

Kalimohan called the Kabulis. They were great, strong cheery-looking devils from Afghanistan and for centuries have come down to prey upon the illiterate and depressed classes in Bengal, who cannot resist accepting some gay trash for their women, which they know they cannot afford, but are being offered without payment down. The Kabulis are mountain bred on the N. W. Frontier of India, drinkers of milk and eaters of flesh. In their wide pantaloons, long bamboo *lathis* in hand, their huge turbans on their heads, often six feet or more in height and broad in proportion, they terrify the meagre

sized population of the Ganges plains. The Imperial Government and police did try to keep some control over them, but, except when they took to force to compel some return on their legitimate claims, these Kabulis were careful to avoid the arm of the law.

(The winters in the Pamir were no fun. The womenfolk could care for the livestock. An investment in cheap coloured cottons at wholesale rates, parted with on twelve months' credit each year, was not only sound business, but could yield a more than hundred per cent return and most of their debtors were tied to the land and could not escape.)

The Kabulis, who, with a Sahib around, would want to be careful. Great strong smiling men they were, armed with their six feet bamboo *lathis*. Kalimohan and I were offered *mora*, or basketry stools to sit on. One of the Kabulis gave us a polite *salaam* and all squatted on their heels. The villagers, overjoyed, gathered around, and the women in the background giggled, with delight and apprehension mixed, at the thought that someone might have come to their rescue. We made little headway, I suspect. The old Kabuli, raising his voice, and gesticulating vigorously, shouted about his rights, his losses, the monies he'd borrowed with which to do legitimate trade, whilst his younger mates urged him to pipe down and to be reasonable in his argument. 'Of course,' said the younger man, 'we put on a big price, because we were taking a big risk, and we are demanding a bigger price still because we must collect from these men what we have lost on all those of our debtors in this village who have run away.'

Another three Kabulis joined the party, one of them a most fearsome looking villain kept well in the background. Then they all rose, *salaamed* and left.

The villagers admitted to us their folly, 'The temptation at the time,' they said, 'was too great for us'. 'Could we help them to get a school? Could we teach them how to do a better job, tanning leather and making it up perhaps into saleable articles?' Kalimohan suggested that here was another possible opening for a profit-earning rural industry.

Immediately on my return a quick lunch, and to Bolpur station with the lorry to collect cases from Calcutta and deliver them to Surul. It is not going to be a simple job to settle in at the speed and with the urgency that the Poet demands.

In the evening tea in front of Pearson's bungalow looking across the bare red desert gravels to the sunset. The Poet was there, Professor and Mrs Levy, Mrs Van Egen, Rathi and his wife, Pratima Devi, Mrs Chatterji and Mrs Sarojini Naidu's daughter. As the sun went down the Poet's grandson, seven year old Nitu, sang to us, then the Poet himself sang, then Mrs Van Egen and then a finale by the Poet. Fascinating, and all very natural and fitting.

But I have a suspicion that too many of the other wives have not yet escaped from a kind of purdah and so have to spend much of their spare time at home in gossip and tittle-tattle. Perhaps when challenged by the need for village extension work which Kalimohan hopes to organise from Surul, they may be persuaded to emerge from their kitchens and offer some kind of service to the village around.

(Not very long after Rathi's wife Pratima adopted a village across the Kopai river to the North, as a special interest of her own and for years ran a kind of Institute there for the women and girls which met under her leadership regularly month by month.)

Tuesday, January 24, 1922

Kasahara, the Japanese carpenter-gardener (recommended to us by Abanindranath Tagore, the artist) arrived at Bolpur station today. We met him and drove him straight to Surul, all sitting on a mattress on the lorry floor. Though somewhat and naturally puzzled at the sight of the building which is to be his dwelling, at present a terrible looking moth-eaten shanty in a most malarious corner, he pointed out, off his own bat, that this would be an excellent site for keeping poultry on. In spite of the fact that we have already paid his debts in Calcutta to the tune of Rs. 900, he came to beg for additional

money. But once we get him established here I have a feeling that he will earn it all back for us.

The land that was offered us for Rs. 8,000 we find the owner paid Rs. 28 for exactly. The contract price for digging the tank jumped overnight from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 4,000. We shall have plenty of struggles before we're through.

Thursday, January 26, 1922

Yesterday, being *chhuti* (holiday), except for sending off eight letters, I made it one, and cycled out to Surul with Willie Pearson, at 3.30 in the afternoon. Leaving our cycles we walked north to Cheap's *Kothi* where Santosh Majumdar had already arrived with the small boys from the boarding school for a picnic.

(Cheap's Collecting Station and Mansion, with his elephant stables, had been built very solidly on the highest point of the forest and jungle by the main road which runs north, to cross the Kopai river, half a mile further on, towards district headquarters at Suri, twenty-three miles away. South the road ran through Surul, across the paddy fields by Moadpur to the former shipping port of Ilambazar and the ford across the Ajai river, leading to Burdwan and Calcutta. Before the railway was built, parallel with it but two miles to the east, this must have been a main trade route which avoided the low lands and rivers of the Brahmaputra and Ganges river to the east and the Dumka hills to the west. Cheap had organised a vast business of woven and patterned cloths for shipment to Britain on behalf of the E. I. Company at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries. Industrial enterprise in Lancashire, with the steam engine and power loom destroyed the base of this commercial structure, and before long machine-spun cloth, with nearly identical patterns, copied from Cheap's exported goods, began arriving in Calcutta at cut rates as against Birbhum hand-woven cloths. The buildings had been nibbled away, but sufficient ruins remained to illustrate the Palladian style of the noble structures, the excellent sitting, the high quality of the hand-made bricks, as well as of the mortar, the

masonry and the plaster. Here too was my first experience of a teak wood forest, planted perhaps by Cheap himself, and naturally regenerated, but now sadly neglected.)

Santosh Majumdar had had a difficult time of it, because the boys had scattered everywhere in the jungle to pick edible berries and some were already lost and wandering in circles in the jungle.

To my horror, for I had set my heart on ultimately acquiring the forest and the ruins as a natural adjunct to the farm a quarter of a mile to the south, I found men busy setting to work to cut all the trees down, large and small, for sale at a few rupees each.

Rumours had apparently circulated rapidly around the owners to the effect that their waste lands only used for grazing cattle and goats and of no commercial value at all had suddenly achieved a new status and might be sold at a high figure. They must remove everything removable of any value as fast as they damned well could.

With no small effort I managed to achieve a philosophic calm, arguing to myself that if progress was to come at all it would be through people and not through things, however seemingly desirable or necessary. But humans are far more ticklish stuff to deal with.

Left Santiniketan at 7.39 p.m. and cycled the one and a half mile in seven minutes to the station on a dusty road. Hopped in to the train with a District Officer, an Indian Christian. We had a long discussion whilst the train passed through miles of dried up rice stubbles, now being grazed. Suddenly we arrived at Suri. The Collector was my first call, on cycle. What a funny old Scotsman! He won my heart immediately by reading me a lecture on the necessity of always pinning cheques to letters inside envelopes. I had apologised on arrival for having sent him an application, but without including my cheque.

Mr Blackwood, I.C.S. had been Director of Agriculture to the Province of Bengal in his day. (I.C.S. men were expected to be able to take on any highly technical job at a

moment's notice and often by seniority or convenience but without any previous training or qualification.)

He felt he was the authority in the Province on cows and breeds of cow. He had clashed swords with the Imperial All-India Centre for Agricultural Reserach at Pusa, he said, over their breeding policy and had fallen foul of the Director, Milligan. He felt strongly that his job was to protect the poor against the powerful. The middle classes, he said, were therefore up in arms and had no hesitation in working off their hatreds on him.

He may be just our man, since in spite of all political upheavals the administrative wheel still turns upon a single hub, the District Collector, I.C.S. He had never troubled to look in at Santiniketan and was, when you consider Tagore's standing in the world as a Nobel prize winner, and among his own countrymen, and as a critic of 'Swaraj' tomorrow, criminally ignorant of Tagore's views and outlook. He had taken for granted they would not differ very much from those of the Maharajah Tagore, a separate family altogether of distant cousins.

When I mentioned that Tagore had advised the tenants in the area of his own zemindari to revolt, he could hardly credit it. He let out a tirade against the idea of crossing imported breeds with *deshi* (local) animals, but he had, I think, not heard of in— or line-breeding, nor had he ever had experience of keeping cows long enough so as to measure their daughters' records against those of their dams. His argument against importation was not convincing, but when he criticised the management of the research station herd at Pusa he was on more solid ground. 'They do not take into account the villager's need for good draft bullocks, and no cultivator will ever take his animals to be served by their bulls.'

'How do you explain the present decline in population?' I asked him. 'Laziness, of course.' This is, I suspect, one of the secondary effects of malaria, and not a first cause. He agreed that malaria and oppression by the middle classes, or *bhadra-log*, as they are called, might be factors in the situation,

but as a good Presbyterian, I suspect, he was bound to look for moral causes.

I made out two applications, one for dynamite and one for a *Kanungo*, or surveyor, who would come and survey the waste land we wanted to purchase, and, with a map of it, prepare the way for land acquisition. The appearance of such an official may bring our friend, who wants Rs. 8,000 for land he paid Rs. 28 for, to his senses. But we shall have to be very careful, indeed, not to upset local susceptibilities.

Rathi and Santosh Majumdar are delighted. They were never able to persuade the old Scotsman to act, a typical Scot too, warm of heart, kindly of humour and not too bright.

Blackwood described Gandhi as a thorough Bolshevik. He'd already had to take steps to fight this non-payment of taxes business, he said. It might so easily, he added, develop into the idea that rent-paying also might go, then out would go the Imperial Government and the *bhadra-log*, or middle class folk as well.

I left the Collector to call on Dr Brachio, a charming Anglo-Indian (meaning in those days a man with both English and Indian blood in his veins) of few prejudices and a nice humility, which always used 'we' and not 'I' when referring to his official actions.

'We tried our best to get Andrews out of trouble,' he said and in going on to say how interested he was in Tagore's school at Santiniketan, he added, 'two more schools like that in India today and the country would not have to worry. The boys are self-disciplined, polite to a degree, never servile, and they carry off all the prizes at our District sports, putting all the other boys to shame by their most exemplary behaviour.'

He had finished his lunch. But as soon as he heard that my last refreshment had been taken at 6.30 a.m. he told his wife and they proceeded to make me very much at home. Then he took me round the jail. From my visit in 1917 to the Naini jail at Allahabad I could have given him all kinds of points especially about the benefits of gardening. Like Naini, this jail was being run by a medical man and seemed more like a

comfortable home than a jail, and there was none of that excessive military discipline that they had at Naini, in fact I thought it was all a bit slovenly. 'No,' he said, 'we have no trouble at all and we turn out some quite useful articles. Yes, we have eight women in here too, for ten years each. They were picked up for having no visible means of support, that is, for being village prostitutes and almost certainly spreaders of disease.' What incarceration ! I was shocked. 'It is often lack of food and sheer hunger that drives them to prostitution,' the Dr said. 'Look at the Santals on the other hand,' said he. 'They are ruthlessly clean. Even when there is a tank fifty feet away they will travel a mile to a spring or well to get their drinking water. They are strict in the selection of well-drained sites for their villages and have the strictest rules about health and cleanliness. As soon as a man complains of fever, they segregate him. Their health record is remarkably good. They rarely suffer either from 'flu or from malaria. They are hardly ever criminal. If they can find an arbitrator from among themselves, they will never take a dispute to court, and will travel a long way to get one.'

The Cheap tradition is an intriguing one, and stirs one to dream new theories. Under what, let us hope, was his benign influence, he built up a network of huge clearing stations. He encouraged spinning and weaving in all the villages around, collated his produce and distributed the raw cotton from Surul as well as other goods for sale, and brought the whole area to a pitch of prosperity well illustrated by the *pukka* (soild) buildings, homes and temples, in such villages as I have already seen. The richer villagers excavated additional tanks, only now deteriorating, until with a sudden thunder clap the bottom fell out. The Manchester school of businessmen demanded protection for their new factories, a law was passed compelling all the villagers to bring their spinning wheels to the police stations, where they were burned. Cheap and his colleagues disappeared. The rot set in, poverty took over. With the putting-in of the railroad and the moving of the *zemindar* (landlord) families to Calcutta to live, everything

saleable from the countryside was realised. Malaria followed the railway and a decimation of population took place, leaving behind the relics of once flourishing communities and of their earlier wealth and culture we see today.

Can the villagers re-establish themselves ? Can cooperation on a variety of fronts be of help ? Can they rebuild a Cheap's industrial structure of their own ?

Saturday, January 28, 1922

In discussing plans today Santosh Majumdar said, 'You could, you know, become very powerful, as powerful as Andrews used to be, before he got so mixed up in politics, because you have won the confidence of the Government people. Pearson had suffered in the same way. Such power can be dangerous, but with your agricultural knowledge as a lever, an ideal one, I do not see why we should not be able to count on closer cooperation with the official world than we have been able to get in the past.'

Gurudev is insistent that we try and acquire Cheap's *Kothi* (house). 'Then you shall build me a room on the top of the walls that remain from which I can look around in all directions for miles and miles.' We discussed our plans at length.

The history of Birbhum District for 1760-90, which I have managed to get hold of, contains quite a little information about Cheap and his policy for the area. It has contributed a number of ideas and much useful past experience from which to build.

Rathi, Santosh Mitra and Santosh Majumdar joined me today in an exploration of the lands north of the farm at Surul. We tried to decide which areas were most worth purchasing. Examining Cheap's house again I discovered that in constructing the solid and fortress-like outer wall of his house he had built a channel for water that could be serviced from his well and that led to a trough by the main road side where bullocks could drink and travellers refresh themselves with a pure supply of fresh water. But the felling of the

forest and the over-grazing of the jungle with the monsoon rains have brought deep gullying erosion up to the edge of the *Kothi*, and have probably lowered the water level in the area, and in Cheap's well by many feet.

We still were not sure how the present Land Act operates. However the *Kanungo* arrived, a somewhat objectionable fellow, and full of loud talk about our not being eligible under the Act as it stands.

Rathi handled him very diplomatically. He simply told him without giving anything of our case away, that he should stick to his surveying job.

As soon as we returned we wired to Thacker Spink's (chief book shop in Calcutta) and asked for a copy of the Land Act. I also drafted a letter to Mr Gourlay, I.C.S., the Governor's Private Secretary, telling him of how the matter stands. We then decided to continue with our plan and not to contact the Collector again until we were quite sure of our ground.

Our new Institution is to be registered within a few days now and I trust there will be no hold up.

The Scot Collector must be all wrong in his opposition to the introduction of foreign bulls for crossing with the *deshi* cows in order to improve their yields. He leaves out too the matter of selection, of inbreeding and of proper feeding altogether. We shall see. Santosh Mitra's little herd is a good beginning, but fodder is likely to be our biggest problem. Oh, for a tractor on these bare uplands and some good crops of *jowar* !

Friday, February 3, 1922

Willy-nilly, I am being hustled along the road at such a pace that, this country being what it is, I am almost out of my wits. I wrote last on Tuesday night. I was up at 6.00 Wednesday morning, and, 'clothed in white samite' that is in my Sunday suit, white tennis shoes, trousers and shirt and with a white shawl worn Bengali fashion, cycled to Santiniketan in the keen morning air, in time for the weekly gathering in

chapel. Wednesday here is our Sunday, as, I believe, it was in India in ancient times.

In spite of the strain of the previous day I was feeling very fit. The proceeding is as always simplicity itself, I only wish I understood the language. Meditating I sit at peace. As soon as it was over the Poet pounced upon me and led me away to his mud cottage. How was I getting on? Would I see the Rajah of Pithapuram? And have a long talk with him?

With Santosh Majumdar and Rathi I went into the royal presence, to find a simple, kind unassuming commonsense sort of a man with something of a philosophic calm about him. He had come up to Santiniketan to meet and remonstrate with his friend Andrews over his association with Gandhi. Gandhi, he says, is in too much of a hurry. He was tremendously encouraged to find that the Poet agreed with him, and that political activities were now barred in the school. The Poet asked me to give the Rajah some of my own impressions. I went hard at it along the following lines. 'In the U.S.A. I had found Indian students working their way through college (at practical jobs) and wondered why they should have to go all that way in order to learn the practical side of life. At the school we are starting here I am hopeful that all the students will earn a part at least of their own board and lodging by their labour on the land, and at the same time pick up a thorough training in one or other aspects of agriculture.

'The problem of India, as of Asia generally, is an all-round problem, and one that includes not only Agriculture, but Industries, Sanitation, Self-Government, Cooperation, the Arts and Education, but all so closely linked and interlocked that you cannot wisely separate them.'

Sunday, February 5, 1922

It does not seem to matter how heavily I lay my hand upon the brake, a rattling pace is forced upon me and willy-nilly must take the reins in a tight grip and try to steer through. But, if he was backed with the kind of crew which I have, what captain would feel afraid?

Yesterday we returned from Hetampur where I had had a chance of studying the habits of a petty Rajah. So long as he was actually on the spot I got my tea in my tent, horrible at that. But as soon as he was out of sight nothing was done. He had made no arrangement for us. The boys set to work to put up their own tent. Not having brought servant, I fared badly. No sweeper appeared and no hot water either.

We had two interminable suppers, with course after course. Stringy chicken followed tough goat and the freshly slaughtered turkey, but all could be washed down with an excellent champagne. The Rajah came to take dessert with us but rose to propose 'the King' before either the port or the liquors had been handed round. We proceeded to drain our empty glasses to His Majesty. Without delay he followed up with two more toasts. I squeezed out a final drop of sherry for the second but not a taste for the third which was all inclusive.

I was introduced to the son of the Rajah of Uttarpara. He reminded me in stature of Billy Temple, somewhat fat and puffed in the face and very alert intellectually but a prince among feeders.

On the way home we stopped at Ilambazar. I hunted for relics of the Erskine family, Collectors (of Textiles) in the original meaning of the word, for the East India Company and allied with Cheap Sahib at Surul. In the Dak Bungalow I found a fine eighteenth century mahogany dining table which must have belonged to the family and some quite interesting china of the same period, which I shall try and get from H.M.G. for our museum.

We were introduced to the local expert in *lathi* play and fighting and took a lesson from him, then crossed the Ajai river, 20 inches deep, without trouble and took our lunch with a delightful Bengali country yeoman farmer. His personal income is said to run into some lakhs and his farming is truly enlightened.

Though a Hindu, he had no hesitation in handing over two guns to the boys and they returned with two 'pipi'. Squatting

on a low stool, with the help of a brass dipper, I took my bath and then we all sat down cross-legged in a row on his verandah and enjoyed a delicious lunch.

As soon as we returned, the inevitable question was put to us. How soon do you intend to move to Surul ? I knew the old answer wouldn't do any longer and that the moment had arrived when we must take the plunge, so I decided to lump it.

Early this morning Rathi came down to Surul with me and with Kasahara, our Japanese carpenter-gardener, and we went round and looked over everything. On our return and after lunch we caught hold of Gurudev and went to the upper room in the Santiniketan house with all the students and directors. Gurudev sat down in a chair. I had left my shoes outside the door and squatted on the floor with the rest. 'Oh, you're used to that already,' he said, 'then why should I sit on a chair ?'

We went over the programme with him, we worked out the day's routine, and parted with his blessing, to pack. The two new Ford lorries, one our very own, ran the baggage and the boys down in no time. I followed on a bicycle with Motru.

After we'd hung the clock and the gong alongside it, and had cleaned up a little, Frin, the boy with a sphinx-like countenance, from Assam, came up and asked if he might speak to me. 'I'm coaching Santosh's nephew in maths. May I go up every day at 7.00 in the evening to help him ?' 'Why ?' 'Because he's behindhand and wants to take his matriculation and no one else will coach him.' 'Won't they ?' 'Well, they won't take the trouble over him that I do.' 'I'll see, but it's doubtful.' 'No chance at all,' said Kalimohan, my second in command. 'Why it would take him all the evening, and as soon as one is allowed to go, all will go.'

Then I left by bicycle to take my supper with Rathi, and returned at 9.15. All the boys were in bed, so I borrowed their lamp and climbed to my loft on the second floor. I was busy unpacking my books when something made me look up. I got a terrible shock. In absolute silence Frin had crept

up the circular iron staircase and was standing silently in the doorway, motionless and more sphinx-like than ever. 'Well?' 'You won't tell Kalimohan?' 'I shan't raise the matter with him again. Why don't you want me to?' 'He won't understand. Can I go every evening?' 'No, you have had to choose between Surul and Santiniketan, between studying agriculture and joining with village boys and being a student at Santiniketan and standing by your friend.' 'But I shall have lots of energy.' 'Yes, but what about the effect on the others?' After a short but rather a silly lecture, I said, 'Why?' 'His brother was my bosom friend. He has gone.' 'So you are left without a friend?' 'Yes.' 'So you want to help his younger brother?' 'I must, or he won't pass.' 'All right! How about two visits a week, one on Sunday afternoon and one on Wednesday morning?' 'Wednesday morning is *chhuti* (holiday). Could it not be in the afternoon?' 'All right, I'll try and arrange this for you and he can come and see you for an hour's coaching on Sunday.'

I find this sort of spirit running through the group, and no grumbling. Buddhadas jumped at the invitation to be official lamp man, and picked up the routine in no time. Frin is the bell boy and the rest will get their jobs tomorrow. Tan Sein is very cut up at not being permitted to join us. He pesters me to be allowed to join us down here and to sleep here as well. But I gather he's at a critical stage in his student career, and full of mischief and energy as well. The Poet suggested my writing to his father while he's at Pithapuram and putting in a claim for some Nellore cattle and a dog or two at the same time.

THE COLLECTOR AT WORK

The Collector of Birbhum District told me that he went to Dubrajpur and found that the Marwaris were refusing to pay taxes. They settle in Bengal to make their fortunes which they intend to take home with them to Marwar, where they are promptly taxed to death. In any uproar they are the first

people to suffer, not unlike the Jews in the East End of London and for similar reasons. In places where non-cooperation is successful, they may get their throats cut.

The first man approached by the Collector, the leading Marwari, said straight out that he would not pay his tax. 'I took him by the arm,' said the Collector, 'whilst the crowd shouted, 'Violence ! Mahatma Gandhi ki jai.' Then I went with him to his house, found his cash box, kicked the lock off (Mr B. can use his feet to great effect) and took out the Rs. 10 to cover his tax. The next one had run away so I booted in his door and carried out two sacks of rice.' You can see that quiet, white mustachiod little Scotsman travelling round his district with his walking stick, doing his duty and being loved by the common people !

Tuesday, February 7, 1922

This morning, two students were put on to surveying (with Upen Babu) and four to woodcutting. I cycled off to Santiniketan to meet Pelly from Calcutta (elder brother of an old friend at Cambridge) and to do business with Rathi. In the afternoon we all set about tree cutting and I had to give a lesson in axe sharpening. 'May I hang on to this axe ? I want to look after it myself.' 'Put your initials on it then and have it ready for inspection. Without pride in your tools you'll never make a farmer.' Tan Sein chipped a piece out of his highly tempered English axe and Subir Tagore hit a nail twice with his '*desi*' or local axe and bulged the edge of it. This gave the occasion for a discussion on differences of temper in metal.

All gathered on the roof this evening for a discussion and retired bubbling over with enthusiasm. Munti is our new accountant, Alu our kitchen man and Buddhadas still the lamp man. They contributed some excellent suggestions.

(It was two years later on that, Nandalal, the head of the art school at Santiniketan, in a discussion about the early days, shelled out the following admission. 'When you started your institute at Surul, you cannot imagine how grateful we teachers

were in the school and college departments. It was the students who were the biggest nuisance to us at Santiniketan and who were not at all academically inclined, who you siphoned off to Surul. We were really so happy to see them go, but we were very sceptical as to what you would ever be able to do with them.')

Wednesday, February 8, 1922

Motru has been elected as chief of this little flock. Being a hard sleeper he was very late up this morning so that the whole bunch missed *mandir* (the weekly service at Santiniketan). I discovered a leaky valve in my cycle tyre, so I was late too.

Gurudev had left yesterday, so the rumour had gone around that there would be no *mandir* this morning, the unconscious desire of all apparently, for though the *mandir* bell was rung and all the boys turned up, the staff had all stayed abed. Kshitimohan took the service.

Meeting Santosh Majumdar afterwards, I asked whether this was not a sad reflection on the school. When Gurudev went away, did this kind of thing always happen? If so, in the years to come, who would take his place? Or was the school only a hero-worshipping establishment?

Rathi, Gour, Santosh and Kalimohan came down to tea and Alu asked us all in to supper. After discussing a cow-breeding programme, Kalimohan put forward a suggestion well worthy of exploration.

If we could raise Rs. 2000, he said, why not buy rice from the villagers with it, then store the rice until the end of the season. When, before the next harvest, the prices jump, sell the rice, cover the cost of storage and the interest on the Rs. 2000, and return the rest to the villagers. We should then have all the villagers coming to us to hold their rice for them and we should have the basis for a cooperative rice marketing scheme right away.

I had feared that we might already be too late to make such a start, but I think we might still make a beginning. Next year

we might start a proper credit scheme and perhaps later a cooperative rice mill.

Very soon I can see there might be the base here for a sizable establishment which could include the distribution of improved seed and implements, and with the profits we might help to guide expenditure in the direction of better education and sanitation all round.

We need too a tile factory.

We decided today to purchase tiles for the roofing of both Kasahara's and Santosh Mitra's houses instead of thatching them with rice straw. Unless the thatched roof slopes very steeply indeed, as it does on the traditional mud cottages in the villages around us, the force of the monsoon quickly penetrates the thatch and anyhow the rice straw used has to be replaced every few years.

Tomorrow we pack up and all leave to attend the annual *Mela* (fair and agricultural show and demonstration combined) at Suri, Birbhum District Headquarters.

Dipu's tame deer escaped yesterday. Down came a note from the Poet (which still survives) asking for the loan of Santosh Mitra's pony, an animal not over four feet high. It was returned in an appalling condition, without its saddle cloth, and dead beat. Never again ! Not even for a Peot's signature. These people have no mercy on animals. (It emerged later that after the deer had been rounded up, the Santiniketan boys had appropriated the pony for 'rides', until it could stand up no longer.)

The plans for the boys' quarters, one bungalow to four boys, have been drawn up. We are going to try and design servants' quarters so that each family can have its own garden plot. This is not going to be easy.

The *pipis* call me to my bed under the stars and I must go.

Friday, February 10, 1922

*Extract from letter to Mrs. Straight.

Your peripatetic Agricultural Department has taken up its abode for the time being at the District Headquarters 24 miles

north of Surul. I know this may sound odd, but really we're very much in luck's way. At this moment we can do little at Surul. The floor is up, the equipment has not all arrived and there is no water as yet except for washing. The staff too is very busy and so at the invitation of the District Agricultural Officer we have come over here.

I sent two men, a servant and a cook, and two students ahead by train. Kalimohan, our driver Alu and five others piled their baggage into the Ford lorry and we drove over here by a wretched road.

But the countryside was fascinating and most instructive. On our arrival we found all three tents up and all arrangements made. I had planned to camp with the boys, but now I'm glad I didn't. They insisted that I should come to the Dak Bungalow where I am now. Each morning and evening I get to myself and am having to work hard overtime in order to have enough mental food ready for them each day. This too is a real rest after those two strenuous days trying to settle in at Surul. Last night after seeing the boys comfortably settled in I dropped around to the Judge's house and found Mrs MacNair in, Mr MacNair came in later, and I was promptly compelled to accept dinner invitations for the next two nights.

At 8.30 a.m. I was round to the tents and then with the boys to the *Mela*, or Fairground. There we were able to fix up a most interesting programme, trips to local sugar-cane plots, demonstrations in tanning, weaving and silk culture, with peanut oil extraction as well, and with lectures as well on Veterinary Science, Hygiene and Agriculture, all from officers of the Bengal Government.

This afternoon I dropped into the tent and thinking of Socrates started, asking questions— but so often I was too impatient to wait for their answers. These are some of the questions I put.

1. 'Is the population of this district diminishing ? Rapidly ?' 'Why ?' Some said 'malaria', others 'debt', others 'insanitary conditions', others 'flu'.

2. 'Is there a lack of grazing ground ?'

‘Yes.’

3. ‘Are the cattle in good condition ?’

‘No, rotten.’

4. ‘Is there a lack of manure ?’

‘Yes, and a lack of fuel.’

Monday, February 20, 1922

Seven days in camp with the boys at Suri have interrupted the diary. These days included supper every night with the Judge, a day with the Veterinary Officer judging cattle, bullocks, cows, goats, sheep, hens and pigeons, as well as rice and cotton seed. Another day we took the lorry and went cross country to a village where the scourge of rinderpest had broken out. The boys will never forget this and what they learnt that day was worth a whole course of lectures. The villagers had decided that rinderpest was ‘an act of God’ and had buried their dead cows right alongside their houses.

On our return to the car we found a group of Santals trying to push the car to make it go. Then Henry Ford’s lighting system gave out and when just within sight of the lamp and oil shop, Alu took the corner too sharply, we hit a boulder protecting the corner house, bent the axle and altered the setting of the radiator. We were hungry so we all sat crosslegged on the verandah of the shop and shared a bowl of *muri* (parched cooked rice) along with Pulin Das, recently freed after seven years in prison in the Andamans.

Remembering a similar predicament with Sam Higginbottom in Gwalior in 1917, when we only had a candle lamp, and whilst Sam drove, I sat on the front of the radiator to tell him which way to turn and where not to go, I now mounted the front mudguard and held up the oil lamp, so that Alu could see a few yards ahead, all the way back to Suri.

On the prize-giving day at the Suri *Mela* I had been invited to make a speech. I wonder very much just what the Collector made of it.

I cycled the twenty miles or so home from Suri and got back to Santiniketan just in time to hear Charlie Andrews give his

first hand account, in an open meeting, to students and staff, of the recent troubles in Malabar. The discussion afterwards was a fascinating affair, because it resolved itself into a discussion between Andrews and the Poet.

The Malabar riots were in the first place, said Andrews, caused by the gross ill-treatment and sweating of Moplah Mussulman labourers by the Hindu landlords. Then came rumours of the defeat of Turkey and news of the Sevres treaty. Then, admitted Andrews, Shaukhat Ali went down into the area 12 months ago to address the Mussulmān committee, and said 'Never, never forget the Amritsar massacres. Gandhi has promised you Home Rule, Swaraj, by non-violence, within a year. Keep the peace for twelve months and if Swaraj doesn't come by the end of twelve months by non-violence you will know what to do. Our religion, remember, is a religion of the sword.' Exactly a year from that day the Moplah rebellion broke out. The Mussulman Moplahs invited all their victims to 'recite the Muslim creed or take a bath.' There were not less than 3000 conversions.

Taking a bath meant being hacked to death in the river by home made swords, in cold blood. An Indian Medical Service doctor admitted to Charlie that he had never, even in the war in France, seen such wounds as were dealt by these crude rough edged weapons. After a wholesale slaughter, with rapine, the tables were turned.

The authorities, that is the Imperial Government, drafted in a lot of half-trained territorial soldiers and some hastily armed irregulars, with all the bitter souled policemen who could be mustered, and these, followed by frantic Hindu mobs thirsting for vengeance, were sent in to 'pacify' the countryside. This they are still busy doing.

Andrews could only see, and enlarged upon, the iniquities committed by the police, by Lloyd George, by the treaty of Sevres and by the Imperial British Government in general. He talked of bayoneted Muslim women and children, of the high souled Congress workers, of his friend Hindle of the Y.M.C.A., of two low caste Hindus who stood firm and de-

cided to 'take the bath', whilst high caste turn-coat Hindus stood by and accepted the Muslim religion. Andrews made continuous appeals to the sentiment and emotions of his student audience. Time and again Tagore tried to pull him up, and kept asking him 'How far do you think you will get towards further progress by appealing to our lowest instincts for revenge, by repeating so often that we must never forget the massacre at Amritsar and the belly-crawling ordered by the British commander. Was it not time for India to learn to say 'We are ready to forgive and to forget all, but to win our own freedom, shall we not suffer willingly by the practice of non-resistance? The day for active non-resistance may come, but not yet. All these poor labourers had had their hopes dashed owing to the very foolish expedient of setting a date. Was it not natural for them to say 'non-violence has failed let us resort to violence' '?

Andrews shirked this issue every time, but at last he shifted his ground and admitted that he himself had felt very uncomfortable when he was speaking recently at a meeting and when most of the official leaders present had decided to use 'Never forget' as their motto and slogan.

Tuesday, February 21, 1922

Andrews upset me badly last night, in part because another of my heroes of earlier days has been swept away. Though he resigned his ordination qualifications, or whatever a parson does to dispose of his official rank as a parson, he still I am sure would say he was a professional Christian or at least a follower of Jesus' New Testament teaching, yet when the Poet put to him the direct question— 'Is not progress likely to come through forgiveness rather than through continued insistence upon the need to recollect past wrongs?' Andrews refused to answer and then gave only a half hearted assent to the Poet's question as to whether men who could talk about non-violence, and yet preach revenge for Amritsar in the same sentence, could be considered quite honest.

Motru has fever. I took his temperature and pulse but I'm

out of quinine. Buddhadas cut his toe with his axe today, I bathed it with boracic, put iodine on and am hoping for the best.

We started a proper sanitation scheme today. Subir, Santosh Mitra and I tarred six buckets and set them in the latrines, after I'd buried what had been in them. They have all agreed to use the latrines tomorrow, and I decided to be on tap to empty the buckets.

'Will there be a sweeper to empty the buckets in the morning?', they asked. 'Or, will the students have to do it?' 'There'll be a sweeper tomorrow,' I said.

Children they still are, but eager to learn and respond. The poet seems to have approved of my first talk.

*Extract from letter to Michael Straight.

Last night some thirty monkeys came into the garden here at Surul and began to steal our green peas. I've never seen such impudence. There were large white haired old gentlemen with very black faces, ladies with children tucked into a kind of little breast pocket, where they put them whilst leaping through the tree tops, and the boys and girls too, all calmly sitting among the peas and tugging them off their stalks.

I ran towards them. They would move a few yards only out of my way. I threw half-bricks at them, but watching the bricks coming with the utmost calm, they would dodge each one as it flew past. They then loped off just out of range until I'd gone. Then back to the peas they went.

Each morning now the wind starts to blow, hard and hot, around eleven, so we retire to study indoors, to lunch and siesta until things cool off again around tea-time.

From where I sit and live up on my roof top I can see for miles across the parched brown paddy stubbles and can watch the herds of cows and goats wandering over them, trying to find food and grazing that isn't there. Until the rain comes next May or June they will all starve and look like walking skeletons.

As the boys were cutting down a tree this morning they

disturbed a snake. They chased it, cut a bit off its tail, but it escaped. I think it was a harmless one.

Wednesday, February 22, 1922

Up at 6 a.m. and round all the latrines to empty buckets. Alu, our lorry driver and an old Santiniketan student, saw me from where he was taking his bath by the well with the students and rushed over to my assistance. He doesn't mind what he does and is ready to put his hand to any practical job that is needed. I made a bit of a row over the fact that one bucket had been tipped over and not put to rights, but I was told that a dog had probably done it and I suspect that that is what happened.

All the boys then came to help to fill up the trench. Tomorrow, some of them at least, may offer to help with the buckets.

Santosh Mitra wants to start them learning to milk cows this week. The jobs as agreed for tomorrow are as follows :

- two for surveying,
- two for trench digging,
- two for putting bamboo poles in the tank to cure,
- all the rest to tree cutting.

By 6.45, this being the day of rest at Santiniketan, we were all in the lorry and off to *Mandir*, the weekly chapel ceremony. The boys were in ill-humour, since their cook had failed to get up in time, so they'd missed their *chhota hazri*. Since the feeding end of their life is entirely in their own hands, I had no pity on them. Motru was up again, Buddha-das was no worse.

A bunch of letters had arrived so I retired to the peace and quiet of Mrs Van Egan's verandah, to read them. Except for the one from Dorothy, a sad lot. Brother R. is down in the dumps. He says sister R. was upset by her stay in Switzerland. Brother P. has got involved with a girl and is talking of leaving his uncle's office, where he is articled as a future solicitor, and of sailing off to Australia. That will upset the parents, who are 'moody'.

Back by 9-30 and to writing until 3-00. A siesta and then by cycle to Santiniketan to change some money and to visit Dinu babu's Tea Drinking Club, lots of fun. The poet's excellent letter had been published in the paper. The railway strike was under discussion. The one really good student in the last fifteen years out of the Agricultural College at Sabour was there, and so on. Suddenly Gurudev appeared on the roof above and all cigarettes were immediately doused and hidden away. It is not apparently good manners to smoke in the presence of one's elders. 'Elmhirst,' he said, 'I've kept the book you lent me, do you mind? Have you had your tea? If not come upstairs.' 'Would I come up anyhow?' Dinu, my host gave me a broad wink and said 'Better go'. I dashed up the stairs. Somehow I felt that entrance to the castle of his mind might at last perhaps have been won.

(Early on, only a day or two after my arrival in November I had realised that Tagore sometimes made snap judgments on first acquaintance, that his enthusiasm quickly aroused could as quickly evaporate, and that until others in whom he had confidence, members of his family or staff, had reported back to him of what was afoot, he could be deeply sceptical. Knowing too of his great impatience to see the work actually started at Surul, I had deliberately kept away unless invited or summoned by note to discuss some specific problem. From chance remarks by Kalimohan or Santosh Majumdar, both trusted by and intimate with him, I had realised that from the first moment, he was immensely curious about how we were setting down to work at Surul, and that they both had had to keep him informed in detail of every move.)

This then was my first invitation into his own sanctum. Morris was present. We had a lively discussion.

The Poet was fertile in comment on my lecture, of how strange the religious climate is in the West where the idea of a meal in common is the central 'mystery' of Christ's own teaching, Christ an Oriental living in a rigidly caste ridden society, with caste distinctions and rules about cooking and the

washing of vessels, so redolent of orthodox Hinduism today.

He went on to speak of Andrews and of the way in which Andrews has allowed himself to be pulled into the contemporary political arena, of Andrews' refusal to look too deeply into the implications of what he is doing, and yet of the fine and willing self-sacrifice he will launch into in pursuit of his principles. He talked of Andrews' absolute determination to try and be fair minded, except of course where the wretched police were involved.

'Could my talk be printed? How had I coped with the problem of emptying the latrine buckets?' He was obviously very intrigued over this aspect of our enterprise. He talked so long in fact that when Santosh Mitra came to fetch me away I had to hurry off since everyone else was waiting for me (for a game of hockey I suspect School against *chashas* 'farmers').

'The *chashas* won'. The School team were quite ashamed of themselves. 'Fancy us being beaten by a lot of *chashas*', said they. (*Chasha* is Bengali for farmer or cultivator, but carries with it quite a denigratory connotation, just as on the Arts Campus at Cornell the 'Ag.' students at the New York State College of Agriculture, further up the hill but in the same university, were often referred to as 'only a bunch of hayseeds'. The Poet has written a song about the Bengali cultivator the first line of which runs '*Amra chash kori anande*', 'we plough, with joy', and this song was adopted by our *chashas* as the appropriate song for Surul).

After the game the Poet spoke of the future prospects for Santiniketan and of the slight respite that the present strike gives us. As we parted he handed me two excellent Indian sweetmeats which I consumed with relish. 'Union of East and West' he said laughing. Dinu remarked, that Tagore's argument in his letter to the paper was bound to be misunderstood. 'They'll read it wrongly', he said, 'and so get a false impression.'

Back to Surul in the dark and then for an hour, discussing

with Kasahara the special qualities of his Japanese tools. 'Ah, but', he said, 'it was the tools I had that were manufactured out of Sheffield steel that were by a long way the best, such beautiful steel.'

Then to work on my next talk.

These boys have never been taught or learnt how to look after themselves. Motru's mother bought her son a topi, or pith helmet, to wear when he worked outside during the heat of the day. He left it behind. Last night he had an attack of fever. Got up this morning, had it again this afternoon, but never let on. His temperature is now 101. He took rice instead of milk and now complains that quinine has upset his stomach. All this at the age of eighteen and intending to go to Europe to study.

Thursday, February 23, 1922

Up at 6.00, and Buddhadas, the bright lad from Ceylon, came to help me swill out one of the latrine buckets. Then I went to see Niteshwar Nag and Satyen Bose, our latest arrival.

Satyen had been earning his keep in the library at Santiniketan as assistant at Rs. 20 a month. He had been pressed by various members of the staff not to come and join us at Surul, since, said they, 'we would not be having any classes.' He had gone to Gurudev. 'Why are you still up here?' said Tagore. 'I was invited to work in the library.' 'Don't be foolish', said Tagore, 'where's a job like that going to lead you? There are hundreds of Calcutta University M.A.'s ready to do it. Get along to Surul.'

Satyen then went to Andrews. 'Don't hesitate' said Andrews. 'Go to Surul immediately.'

The boys had been set to the carrying of the bamboo poles, from a pile where they had been thrown from the bullock carts, to the tank or pond where they were to be seasoned by being floated in the water. These poles were to form a framework upon which the thatching of rice straw would be tied to form the roof over the student quarters to be. They had already

pushed some twenty into the water but all criss-cross, so that many of them were still half out of the water. Coolies had already unloaded quite a few into the water but had laid theirs neatly in parallel rows. I pointed this out and then we all went waist deep into the tank, amid much groaning from Niteshwar, until we got them straightened out.

These poles ferment in the water. By remaining a month under water they cure and season rapidly.

Munti and Buddhadas were busy chopping away at a tree that had to be removed for the building of the student houses. Munti's axe was so blunt we took it away to sharpen where there were some smooth stone steps.

Trench digging was going ahead.

(I had learned this entrenching process from Sam Higginbottom at the Naini Agricultural Institute he founded near Allahabad and where I worked from late 1917 to early 1918. In fact he had asked me to photograph and to write up the process, as he himself had learned it from the doctor formerly in charge of Naini jail. The theory was that if a trench was dug 14" deep and five feet by two feet every day, and all the waste from kitchen, garden and latrine buried in it, under 14" of earth, the fermentation that went on was such as to destroy fly larvae and noxious bacteria. As the whole settled down a layer of organic material remained, which acted not only as a fertilising agency for some years to come but as a barrier to the leaching out of moisture during the hot weather. The crop results at his Institute had been spectacular over a series of years and the small iron ploughs he used did not of course disturb this beneficial layer at 14 inches depth. There were good reasons for not going deeper or shallower.

Medical men later questioned whether the bactericidal effect of the fermentation was completely successful but the problem of disposal of human and other wastes in hot climates is such that there were obvious advantages to this method. When a plot had been measured out for trenching the first spit of earth dug out was barrowed away and piled at the far end of the plot ready to cover over the last and final trench. The earth from

each new trench therefore covered the previous day's waste and rubbish.)

On this day Gour Gopal Ghosh arrived and took over staff duties. Gora he is called, or respectfully, Gour Babu. He is a tower of strength. He played football for the *chashas* last Wednesday and is a first rate back.

Niteshwar too is coming along. He plays an excellent game in the forward line at soccer and gave me some tidy passes. By nature a pessimist he always visualises the worst that can happen and is inclined to be somewhat scared when put up against a serious challenge. But he is a regular time-keeper and is rapidly losing with me his first hesitations and shyness

Gopal I can get little or nothing out of. Not being Santiniketan educated, he seems to be half-scared of ever opening his mouth at all.

After letters the boys all come up to my room for a discussion, this time on trenching. I told them that until they'd each had the experience of emptying their own latrine buckets in trenches on their own garden plots and then of seeing the result on their own crops later, they could not consider themselves farmers. They might try to think of the material as comparable to 'solid gold' and that since the Poet himself emptied his own bucket why shouldn't they ?

'Of course we should do it,' commented Satyen. Alu tells me they had a long discussion among themselves afterwards and are determined to try and overcome their natural and religious distaste and to do it for themselves.

Later on we hope to rig up a moveable iron framework which can be shifted each day over the newly opened trench and in which one can squat happily without ever having to empty a bucket at all¹.

¹ Some 27 years later I visited the Teachers' Training Department at Santiniketan and was asked to inspect the students gardens. 'But', said I, 'whatever are those little thatched sentry boxes scatterd around?' 'Don't you recognise them?' they protested, 'you ought to know,' But I don't. 'Why' said they, 'we always call them Elmhirst latrines.' 'Could I have a greater compliment.' I asked !

Santosh Mitra tells me that the Poet chaffed him yesterday about our trenching and bucketing.

Piping hot this afternoon, no breeze at all, but the siesta worked.

Thursday, February 23, 1922

Rathi arrived at tea-time. He and Gora and Santosh Majumdar and Kasahara walked with me, round the estate.

Is it lack of vitamins, of proper food, of normal energy and life, that prevents the Indian mistri, or skilled worker, completing a job decently ?

We examined Kasahara's manure pit, designed Japanese fashion. We decided on the site for the cottages, then took our tea on my roof top, three stories up, with its incredible view to distant horizons in all four directions.

Then we drove Motru up to the Santiniketan hospital, and at 6.00 I called in at Dinu Babu's. 'Gurudev was hunting for you all over the place yesterday and was very worried at your not being here,' he said.

My new *Jobbah* was much admired. 'So in keeping', said Mrs Van Egan, who proceeded to tell me some of her own anxieties.

I was invited upstairs on to the Poet's roof. Professor and Madame Levy were there and he assented to the theme of my next talk. Gurudev asked me for a copy of my last one so that he could turn it into Bengali. A great honour !

The Rajah of Pithapuram's vina player arrived. For sheer intoxication let me commend the vina played by a masterhand. I'd never heard such playing before. 'The violin,' I suggested in a whisper to Dr Levy 'is a vulgar instrument to this.' 'No, no !' he protested. 'But look at the directness of its message—no ivory keys, no insensitive bow and the fingers on the strings will always be better adapted than the voice to the production of the most delicate of sounds. Here is the direct touch and so the more direct interpretation. Listen to its incredible range, from the noble chords of a Handel to a lover's whisper or a mother's lullaby. No instrument for the great concert hall,

but for an intimate group of friends on a roof top with the stars above, with the scents of an Indian spring in the gentle breeze which wasted away the last sound, so as to be no longer sound at all.'

Most perfect were the single airs, without accompaniment, falling and rising like feathers in the wind, the dropping into a minor key until all the suffering of the human race seemed to have been caught up by this artiste on his incredible instrument, and to have been purged and cleansed away.

I was sitting close to Gurudev and behind Manju, his niece. 'Wouldn't you like to hear some European music played?' he asked. I was on the point of saying 'no', when Dr Levy answered, 'by all means'. It was a horrid anticlimax and you could feel the player's distaste for being turned, as so often he must have been, for European guests at his master's court, into a showman.

I took supper with Rathi and cycled home.

Friday, February 24, 1922

A red letter day in the history of our new institution. Munti and Satyen both carried latrine buckets and emptied them into the trench this morning and placed them back again in position.

Nepal Babu slept down here last night. He is a keen follower of Gandhi, but is also convinced that the programme at Surul is a proper one. Not long ago with a group of boys and with funds from Congress he started work here on a political programme. We walked all around the place. Then I lent a hand with the trenching.

The boys had agreed to start a magazine of their own to be finished last night. Santosh Mitra, who is a consummate draughtsman when not farming, volunteered to design a cover. Because the cover had not materialised how could they start writing their contributions, said the boys. Perhaps a better balanced diet will result in a more abounding energy.

They agreed to form a Farmers' Union since all would be going into production for themselves on the one-tenth acre of garden attached to their houses. The Poet had appointed me

Director of the Institute. The boys elected me Chairman of their Farmers' Union. I suggested that they might write up the word 'Swaraj' (i.e. Home or Self -Rule) on every wall of their temporary quarters since this was to be our home for the time being and we were all rulers in it.

'Once we learn how to keep our own house and home clean and in good shape, we can then and not before, offer advice to other people about their homes, villages, streets and towns. Two of you have already won a victory for this place in overcoming your natural prejudices and in carrying out one of the most unpleasant jobs that I know of, so that you are fit, by so doing, to tackle any other job that comes your way. There is no practical task you need ever be afraid of facing in the future and you will I suspect not easily forget this day of achievement.

'As a society living together what are we to do about rules ? Shall I make them all and force you to obey them or are we to plan them together ? Without your full concurrence it will not be Swaraj, that is rule of ourselves but rule by the Director. Unless a majority of you agrees to the rules and assists in making them, you will never feel like observing them. All meaningless rules are just a nuisance. Essential rules on which we can all agree will be a convenience to the easy operation of our society.

'Yesterday,' I said, 'two of our members went up to the Ashram at Santiniketan without leave. I don't know who they were, but they must have felt that this rule was a meaningless imposition, that they had never agreed to it, that we had never argued it out and that all they had to do was to break it.'

'But we have no games equipment of our own down here.' 'Until our own arrives,' I said, 'all students can use the games period during the week for visiting the Ashram provided they are back here in time for supper at 7.20. unless they have special permission.'

'Whether we are a self disciplined lot or no will soon be patent to everyone. Alu can tell you just what Army discipline was like when a war had to be won. In my platoon in the

Army in England we lost the cleanliness shield by one mark in our hut because, just as he was leaving the hut, after inspecting it, the officer reached up and ran his finger along the top edge of the door.

‘We shall need to work out our own customs and manners in relation to private possessions. The doctor lost his pen on his last visit here and found it among one of our boys’ belongings. As soon as you have your own rooms in your own huts, you will discover what it means to look after your own things in your own houses.’

Gora and I discussed what changes were needed in a diet that had to cover the expenditure of a lot of physical energy. We agreed that at present they are eating, or rather bolting mounds of polished rice at each meal and that their work was suffering. Whilst I was away this morning they had just managed to dig half a trench only and to fill it. They probably lack vitamins too.

Their programme is :

- 4.30 Gram (dried peas).
- 7.30 Milk.
- 11.00 Lunch or tiffin—rice.
- 5.00 Muri (parched rice).
- 7.30 Supper—more rice.
- 9.30 Bed.

They rest during the heat of the day, between 11.00 and 3.00.

At 4.00 p.m. Rathi arrived bringing Kalimohan with him, fresh from attending a meeting of Congress leaders. They had apparently discussed with him our Surul programme and had agreed to its general lines.

With Gora and Nepal Babu we four walked through Surul village, and called on one of the headmen, manager of the Sircar estate. Sitting on his verandah he told us that he was the grandson of Mr Cheap’s accountant. The village is full of well established brick and plaster mansions, showing what wealth must have flowed through it in the past.

Nepal Babu thinks we shall not need to use the Land Acquisition Act after all.

Somehow the English word shovel has become attached to the implement we call a crowbar, here named *shawbawl*.

Saturday, February 25, 1922

Two red letter days because two students yesterday, and two today, including one Brahmin boy, overcame all their natural and religious prejudices and of their own free will cleaned out the offending latrine buckets. What a victory it is ! For them especially !

Tomorrow one starts work in the dairy. Their elected captain has just been up to ask for the day's programme and for a special privilege for himself which, with some trouble, he agreed on his own initiative to retract, and so went happily away.

The Chairman of the newly elected Local District Board has today written very nicely offering all help possible. The chief zamindar, landlord that is, of Surul and neighbourhood, on whom I paid an official call yesterday, paid us a visit this morning to see our manure trenching and other enterprises and to offer his own support.

The girl students from Santiniketan are to come and visit us one day a week and to share a common meal with our boys.

The food problem is a difficult one. I found the kitchen servant cleaning the boys' brass drinking vessels this evening with fresh cow dung. The rice water in which the rice has been cooked was being thrown away.

The students have swept up the place well. Our new chickens are due to arrive shortly, though we're hardly ready for them. The second lecture on our local problems is finished. The Poet keeps pestering me to get the first one into final shape so that he can translate it into Bengali. Gour Babu (Gour Gopal Ghosh), has come from Santiniketan to live with us here for the present. He was one of the poet's early students in his school at Santiniketan, he is one of our Board of Directors and is a great sportsman, also a famous footballer.

We've heard of a good doctor, who is also an enthusiastic food canner, and will cost us £4 a month. We look like getting at Government expense one of the best agricultural

officers they have. The enterprise is as you may gather not perfect but it is not dead.

Monday, February 27, 1922

Jatin Babu has been lent to us by Suren Tagore. He now wants to make his home here. He's got the reputation of being a first-rate accountant and has already absorbed the standard works I brought out with me on Farm Accounting from America and England.

Like others on our staff he is also something of a crazy idealist, willing to work for a bare living and keen to practice his other profession as a school teacher.

When the leading men in the village of Surul begged us to open a school for their children we sent him along to be headmaster. The village is raising a fund to cover his salary.

Some form of project system will be started right away so that they can learn from a cooperative enterprise from the outset.

The Muslim farmers came to see us today from a village half a mile away. They wanted to see everything we were doing and they want a cooperative store and a post-office.

The local weavers have asked to be supplied with yarn at wholesale prices and to be given marketing facilities on a profit-sharing base, which might become a buying and selling cooperative later.

We hope to get a man down from Santiniketan who has experience of operating a cooperative and the Muslim farmers, sturdy men are ready to take out shares. We have become quite a centre for pilgrimage in the evening already.

The doctor came tonight and Nandalal with all his fellow artists and a European, a Czechoslovakian artist, just arrived and convinced that men will continue to fight and kill one another to the end of the world.

The Minister of Agriculture for Bengal has said that the Chairman of the District Board may stand in the way of our getting Santosh Bose as our Agricultural Adviser. But the Chairman writes to me to say that the Minister will be foolish if he doesn't give him to us.

I am almost frightened at the way in which walls are falling down all around and so rapidly. Oh ! if you could meet my staff and helpers ! Nepal Babu has tonight decided to come and cast in his lot with us and 'to leave politics to the Calcutta lawyers'. He was one of the first masters at the Poet's school at Santiniketan and is a tower of strength.

We expect a doctor any time now. The chickens arrived like a thunderbolt today, so we've just been working out with our surveyor a model hen house to suit Indian conditions.

The boys of Surul village want us to help them with their games. My first lecture has gone up to the Poet to be typed out. I'm tired but content.

What a nation is this ! Its failings and its shortage of practical common sense I forgive. Its blind idealism I bless, and its readiness to suffer.

Of all the boys Subir Tagore alone strikes at the job of bucket emptying, a Brahmin of Brahmins. (It was apparently his old grandmother who was urging him to resist but I think he'll do it tomorrow).

Tuesday, February 28, 1922

A great party here at Surul this evening. All day we slaved to clean everything up. By tea time the new floor to the verandah was finished.

In the lorry arrived Manju, Subir's beautiful sister, Motru's sister, Minu, with the curly hair his mother, Mrs Sen, who looks after the girl students' dormitory and two other girls, Pratima, Rathi's wife, came with them and Miss Stella Kramrisch. All the girls climbed up the stairs on to my roof.

Then came the Poet, with Mrs Van Egan, and we all sat down to tea together on the verandah, Pearson, Mrs Van Egan and Miss Kramrisch and a Mrs Fochens at the table and the rest in rows on the floor.

After tea we made a general inspection—the hens, the farm, the new house for the sweeper, the new garage, the half completed workshop, the new manure pits, Santosh Mitra's house,

his bi-khana and Kasahara's house. We returned by the new sump pit, to be finished tomorrow I hope.

Back to the verandah for a musical evening. Mrs Van Egan led off with *Der Lindenbaum* and some Bach. The girls followed with some of the Poet's latest songs, new tunes to new words, and our boys followed on.

Mrs Van Egan told me later that the Poet was in great form on the journey home, fairly bubbling over with delight, she said. Rathi says my talk is being turned into Bengali and that his father approved of it and wants to have it printed as the first of his new University's bulletins.

I was duly encouraged, but much more excited by the news :

1. That almost for certain Santosh Bose will be allowed to join us on loan from the Bengal Government Agricultural Service.

2. That all the traditional weavers in Surul village want to form a union and to work with us.

3. That the Muslim tenant farmers are interested in watching everything we are doing, want a cooperative and are willing to pay towards a teacher and to sign a request for a branch post-office.

4. That Kartik Sircar the leading zamindar in Surul wants us to take responsibility for the village school and run it and is willing to contribute towards the teacher's salary.

5. That Jatin Babu, Surendranath Tagore's chief accountant in Calcutta, wants to leave Calcutta altogether to make his home with us, and to do our accounting and filing for us.

6. That the boys in the village can be encouraged to start garden plots inside their home compounds, so that we can get a garden club started and individual garden projects straight away.

(Comment on 1. Useful as everything I had learnt at Cornell between 1919 and 1921, especially in dairying, poultry, economics, farm shop work and rural education, I knew that I could not get in a short two years time detailed knowledge about soils, soil chemistry, crops and cultivation, especially for rice, vegetable and fodders in a sub-tropical climate. It was

to supplement our efforts on this flank that the obtaining of Santosh Bose's expert agricultural services were vital. Trained at Sabour under a Cornell trained Bengali he had the outlook and the will to make the practical application of his knowledge of crops that we most needed, so that from the farm new ideas, new crops, seeds and vegetables did sift into the surrounding area. On the best modes of extending his knowledge into the villages he was probably not as much the master as of how best to try out on the farm the best varieties to suit local conditions and the best modes of cultivation and of fertilisation. In our early days too before we had got control over the monkeys his introduction of crops like tomatoes and cauliflower would have been a hopeless proposition.)

Wednesday, March 1, 1922

Letter to D.W.E.

Last night the Poet and Mrs Van Egan and Miss Kramrisch, with six of the girl students came down from Santiniketan to take tea with us. We had been tidying up all day and felt beautifully spick and span. Our new verandah floor makes this place a palace for us upstairs and we all had tea on it together. Then we went round the farm, the new hen house, the manure pits and trenches, the roofs to the new student houses, sweeper's hut, the sump pit, our patent brooms and leaf cleaners, all came in for inspection. Then we gathered on the terrace in front of the house, squatting on our mats. The Dutch lady sang 'Der Lindenbaum'. The girls followed with some of the Poet's then the boys and then all of us together, in the starlight, a merry evening.

Gurudev was delighted. On the way home he overdid himself by saying that he'd always hoped for two things at his school, a good Art Department and a good Agricultural School and now he'd got them both and something of a genius at the head of each. He doesn't see that no other but his boys could have made the place what it is. They're a good lot. He's now translating into Bengali my first lecture.

Being our Sunday I came over to Santiniketan to work on

the second at the library. Later Dinu Babu was teaching our boys some farming songs as I sat with them. The Poet's tunes are really a delight and the great vina player from Pithapuram accompanied us. He was at his best this morning. I was enthralled. This is not just because of a sentimental feeling for things Indian. The instrument seems so perfectly adapted for real greatness of expression, for light and shade, such compass, such rhythm, now whispering, now soothing, now stirring.

When Europeans are present he can, being a true artiste, feel what they are feeling and find himself quite out of sympathy with them. I had crept in behind him today.

Friday, March 3, 1922

Wednesday March first was spent as a real holiday. The poet had commented adversely on the rather crude attempt of us *chashas* to sing his Bengali songs and we had persuaded Dinu Babu the leader at the Music School at Santiniketan to give a lesson to our boys after morning chapel. The great vina player was also on hand. There being no other Europeans present, I crept in behind him and he played, I was told, at the top of his form.

Later in the football game I took a fall, the ground being as hard as nails, and sprained a wrist. I took refuge with Pearson. Mrs Van Egan gave a party at tea time and all my newly made friends were there, the Poet himself, Dinu Tagore the musician, Rathi Tagore, the Poet's son, Santosh Majumdar, almost like the Poet's own son, Prabhat Mookerji, the librarian, and Gora, the football champion, once the impregnable back for the Mohan Bagan team in Calcutta which annually defeated the best team the British garrison troops could produce. There was much singing and playing in between the discussion.

Whilst this was going on, our students the *chashas* or farmers as they are now termed, passed down the road in front of us on their way to Surul singing gaily, but so out of tune as to give acute pain to both Dinu and the Poet in their aesthetic insides.

'Elmhirst must be feeling very proud' remarked the Poet.

After he had gone Mrs Van Egan said 'Didn't your ears burn a little last night. As we came home Gurudev was overjoyed. You have made him so happy. 'I'd always wanted a good Art School and a good Village Department, and if I get both I shall be content. I feel I've got something of a genius at the head of each.'

I laughed. 'It's only common sense and a little imagination so far and a bare beginning. We've a long way to go'. I thought of the months I used to sit at the bottom at Cattley's Upper Fifth at Repton before struggling into Somervell's History Sixth, and of my Third in the History Tripos, barely scraping through.

When our football game was over Mrs Sen and the four girls invited me to tea and to eat the Bengali *mishti*, or sweetmeats that 'my soul loveth'. The girls, Manju, Minu and the others, then tried to extract a promise from me that I would open a special department at Surul for them. I could see that they were quite serious about it and that Mrs Sen was not wholly unsympathetic.

But when I told Gurudev of their ambition, he laughed. 'Not one of the boys you've sent me', I said, 'has the remotest idea of how to look after himself, and their mothers never seem to have told them how. Shouldn't your girls learn something besides dancing, drawing, music and art ?'

'Wait a year', he added. 'I agree with you but you'll find that these girls are not really serious about it. If they come to you you'd find them either giggling or weeping, and you'd have no end of trouble with them'. Rathi and Santosh Majumdar seemed to agree with him and the only strong support for my proposal came from Kalimohan.

A thunderstorm all around us, but with no rain here, cooled things off for today, and after failing to get to sleep at first, slept well. All day I've been on my legs, suggesting, overseeing, inventing. The District police chief, a Panjabi with his family came to see us. They were delighted apparently with what they saw and will report at Suri, District headquarters no doubt to the District Magistrate and to the Judge when they all meet at the Club tonight.

The boys and all our coolies have been busy getting the first student's house finished today.

Santosh Mitra has now settled into his house too. His old mother is strictly orthodox. When I appear a hundred yards away she quickly covers her face and makes a bolt for it. His wife is also somewhat under her mother-in-law's thumb except when she gets back to Santiniketan where she was trained by Pratima Tagore.

Our overseer had built two brick pits to catch the waste kitchen and bath water. I had prophesied they would quickly become breeding pits for mosquitoes and sure enough the family had not troubled to put tins in the pits to catch the water, so I helped Santosh to make two and with one of them emptied one of the pits. 'Don't let the Sahib do it, I'll do it' came a voice from somewhere within. 'I'm sorry', I called, 'but it's done'. Then I gave orders to have the pit destroyed and filled up.

Our old buffalo bull is past use. I want badly to give him a painless ending. Immediately I find myself up against entrenched tradition. 'Please send it by train to—where there's a free house for old cows' says everyone. Anything to shelve the responsibility. Gora and Santosh admitted he had much better be put by and buried under the mango trees but Jatin Babu isn't convinced. He admits that of all inhuman cruelty, that dealt out to the cows in this district is the worst. Are we to tell everyone who wants to give a quick end to a beast in misery that they must book a railway truck to take it away to where it can die in greater misery?

We shall find a solution no doubt. I was busy trying to invent a new and cheap style of brooder for our chickens this evening. They are due off in a few days. But a storm blew up and we had to get fifteen men to help us indoors with the new carpentry bench just finished. For an hour ten separate storms swirled and thundered around us. Now all is still and cool at last.

Sunday, March 5, 1922

Suren Kar, the artist and senior member of staff in Nandalal's Art School, has just had two of his pictures accepted for the International Exhibition in Paris this year.

There had been a difference of opinion between Kasahara and Upen Babu our overseer and surveyor, over the construction of the students' bungalows. I'd not been able to give time to sorting out their differences and there had been some friction.

This evening the three of us sat down quite happily to work over an arrangement for accommodating sitting hens.

Kasahara told me that twenty years ago he had built incubators for a German, and he insisted on putting holes in the *gamlas*, pottery jars resting sideways, for the sitting hens. He will arrange them in tiers against the wall. Already we have seventeen eggs.

Tomorrow Jatin Babu is to take over the account keeping. What a kindly and delightful old character and full of ideas.

(Almost forty years later Dhirananda Roy was taking me from the weaving shed at Surul past the staff quarters. 'Would you like me to see if we can call on Jatin Babu' he said. 'But of course, is he still alive?' 'Yes, and over ninety'. There was the same old twinkle in the eye and that kindly smile as he grasped me by the hand.)

Buddhadas has been elected goat-herd. He is to clean out their house every morning and to see that they have water.

Subir Tagore is to be second in command to Niteshwar in charge of poultry. The latter had left the hens without water and was properly dropped on by his fellows this morning when he returned from the *hat* (market). 'Did he expect the hens to lay dried eggs?' I was happy that we could get fresh water mussels in the bazaar at a half-penny per pound. They make excellent henfood, lime and fresh protein in one.

Motru, who had been one of Nepal's students, complained that the Surul village boys had been very rude to him. 'They came and laughed at me because I was no longer wearing *'khaddar'*, (home-spun cotton material worn by all Gandhi's

followers) and only a year ago had been preaching *khaddar* to them.' 'If you believed in *khaddar* then and are not wearing it now, haven't they some justification ?' I asked.

(*Khaddar*, if really spun by hand on the charka, or hand spinning wheel, could be uneven in its thread, when spun by novices and in wearing not very comfortable to a sensitive skin. As the political demand for it grew, cotton mills began to turn it out by machine so that it looked like the hand-made article.)

There were more casualties today in the way of damaged feet. I had to treat Frinton's feet today. If they get a wound, they run in, dab some iodine on it, tie it up with a bit of dirty rag and hope for the best, leaving plenty of dirt in the wound. Then they wonder why it doesn't get better.

Yesterday evening I attended the Hindu traditional ceremony, which corresponds to baptism in the Christian churches, for Santosh Majumdar's second son, now six months old. This is the first occasion when a child partakes of and is initiated into the art of eating solid food, in this case rice, and so becomes as it were a full member of the family. Pearson and Andrews both upset their stomachs seriously by their determination early on to feed solely on Indian food. They also wore the Indian shirt and dhoti. But Tagore urged me not to be so foolish. Only on special occasions do I eat whatever Indian food is put before me. 'Mr Pearson won't eat hot foods' (curries) said my hostess, 'Mr Elmhirst does not seem to mind'. It had taken Pearson many months of milk diet to recuperate from his experiment with Indian food. The six months old child already sits cross-legged like a little Buddha as if the position came to him by heredity.

Friday, March 10, 1922

March 9th Thursday I took cycle to catch the 7.30 a.m. train to Sainthia en route to Suri. It had been cancelled. I cycled back to Rathi's bungalow, left all I could behind and in shirt and pants mounted for Suri, 23 miles away, had to wade two streams carrying my steed, skidded frequently in inches of dust,

which at times threw me off altogether when I met a concealed rut. When, at length, I did hit the last eight miles of pucca road, the mid-day furnace blast, like the old khamsin in Mesopotamia, hit me head-on and blew a gale.

I didn't mind. I was as happy as a bird, rehearsed my lecture to the soil and to the trees, sang and, only when I was in danger of falling off with the cramp every five minutes, did I decide to dismount and walk the last three miles. I began to wonder whether I could, in the excessive heat, manage the last few hundred yards.

I landed up at the agricultural office and found Santosh Bose delighted at the thought of coming four days in each week to help us at Surul.

The Judge invited me to lunch, as pleasant as his wife was kind. I rested in the afternoon, then discussed Land Purchase and then all through the evening, Andrews and Gandhi and their hopes and aims.

At 10.30 p.m. they drove me by moonlight to Ahmadpur and left me to the mercy of the bugs with which the waiting-room and its furnishings seemed alive. Having borrowed a rug I decamped to a pile of corrugated iron sheeting under the stars, then to a luggage carrier and finally to some sacks full of rice, so, until the train came in at 2.30 a.m. only achieved fitful slumber.

Failing to wake up at Bolpur I was carried off to Burdwan and arrived there at 5.00 a.m. only to find that there was no passenger train in the reverse direction till the evening, but that at 7.30 a.m. a goods train would set off. After a cup of tea and a rest, I put my cycle in the van and waited for the guard to appear. He agreed to get permission from the station-master whilst I bought a ticket, but the engine driver explained that without an order he couldn't possibly stop the train at Bolpur.

The station-master then had a word with the guard. 'When you stop at Bhedia tell the station-master there to have the signal at Bolpur put at danger red, then he'll have to stop and the sahib can jump off. (The feeling of pride over Tagore's institution

at all points on the railroad between Calcutta and Bolpur always had the effect of stirring railway officialdom into sympathetic activity and for many years an old Santiniketan student was station-master at the big junction at Burdwan).

The guard discussed the basis for the railway strike with me all the way to Bolpur. 'The railway *chowkidars* (watchmen and police) get only Rs. 7 a month' he said, 'so in order to live, they have to steal.'

Back and slept. In the afternoon up to see Gurudev at 6 p.m. 'Will you take a cup of tea ?' he said, 'if Morris has left any'. We discussed the various problems on the horizon and then went together to the Art School. My talk lasted an hour. Levy and Gurudev entered into the discussion which lasted till 8.30. I told them that in wartime both were liable to be classified as freaks and of little combat value. Gurudev wants to translate this one also.

Out this evening to a Muslim village with Kalimohan, Alu and Buddhadas. We all sat cross-legged in the village hall. The villagers were charming, keen, eager, and full of ideas, and of humour.

'Yes, they had three diseases among their *murghi* (chickens). No, they never collected or stored their chicken manure. We described our trenching system and they asked just what we included under the heading 'waste matter'. 'Cowdung, goat and chicken manure', 'yes', they said, 'we could include all those, but' said an old grey-beard, 'human manure, never !'

They went on to define their needs. They want a co-operative store, a better breed of hens, a schoolmaster and a supervisor for boys gardens. To my great surprise I spotted two large capons (castrated cocks) strutting about.

The boys asked for a repetition of my Santiniketan lecture of the evening before. So we sat on the roof top around a map drawn in charcoal on the floor. 'Wonderful and so young too', commented Jatin Babu. 'I've never heard facts marshalled like that before'.

Off to Calcutta tonight by the 2 a.m. from Bolpur.

Wednesday, March 15, 1922

Still short of sleep cycled up to the Ashram for chapel at 7 a.m. and was too late. Found Rathi at home and then the vina player and Dinu Babu, the music master, arrived and they played Indian classical music. Slept two hours and after lunch three more. Having no shoes with me, declined the football game but joined in at tennis. Later under the stars we discussed the political set-up and the early Swadeshi movement (Swa-our, deshi-country).

Rathi told of one of the anarchists who had been arrested and condemned to death, of how in prison he had continued to put on weight each day up to the very day he was hanged ; how they had to wake him from a deep sleep that morning and how gladly he looked at the countryside around on the way to the gallows, convinced that in his next birth he would surely be able to serve his country to better effect. When some ten others who were condemned to be transported for life, heard the terms of their sentence, how they all burst out into song, one of his father's songs, all the way back to the prison in the van.

The anarchist movement was really in character something of a spiritual movement. The members refused recognition to all ideas of untouchability, they lived their creed to the limit and it included all Gandhi's political formulae. 'My father was' Rathi said, 'warned by the British Government not to compose any more songs that might fire patriotic fervour.' When the Secretary of State for India, Mr Montague, came out from London to discuss the plans for what Parliament later termed the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform Bill, he asked to see the Poet alone so as to have a frank talk with him at Jorasanko, the Poet's home, on the political situation.

I suggested that the basis of much of the prejudice in England against Montague's plans was due to deep-seated fears among the British womenfolk, especially among those who had been out in India with husbands in official positions and who could never imagine highly paid British Civil Servants working for or advising Indian Ministers. Any step which might bring

attractive Indian women into polite contact with their British menfolk was likely to arouse anxiety in the British women's minds.

Friday, March 17, 1922

I had asked the students to draw up a set of rules for themselves which they could present to the Management for comment and if passed, for approval. Since some of them had been students at Santiniketan for some years and all had been there for a time, they knew enough about the uses and abuses of freedom, to be able to make a fair shot at a Magna Carta, but I had no idea how their ideas would emerge.

This morning Munti brought me his translations of the Bengali rules drawn up by the students. They read thus :

1. Greet your teacher or your fellow student when you meet in the morning.
2. Leave your beds as soon as you can when the bell rings.
3. Everyone must keep his seat and belongings neatly in order.
4. Any uncleanness in the College premises or compound must be properly attended to and removed.
5. Never use anything belonging to the College without the knowledge of the officer-in-charge.
6. Be careful in using tools, implements, laboratory apparatus belonging to the College and always clean it well before you return it. If anything is damaged when in use promptly bring it to the notice of the authorities.
7. Do not leave your rooms after the hour to retire for the night.
8. Do not leave College premises without permission of the proper person.
9. Everyone is expected to do his duties with heart and soul.
10. Help your captain with implicit obedience. Discipline is the best of virtues.
11. When you detect any slackening amongst yourselves take the task of removing it on yourselves too. Never

forget that on you lies the full responsibility of making this Institution a success.

Friday, March 24, 1922

Another river crossed this morning. I found that the boys some days after we took a professional or caste sweeper on to the paid staff, could not see why he should be deprived of his ancient duties and had quietly handed over the bucket emptying and cleaning to him.

I spoke to Kalimohan about it last night and told him I would take on the job again myself this morning, since I didn't want to have to command the boys to do it themselves, yet to see that we'd taken a step backwards in allowing the sweeper to undertake 'Home Rule' on our behalf.

Kalimohan had however passed the word to the boys that I had 'wished it' on them.

After I'd emptied everything into the trench, including one that was overflowing, Satyen Bose came up to me and said in a very aggrieved tone of voice : 'Why did you go and complain to Kali Babu and not come direct to us ? That's not fair to us. We'd have done it readily if you'd asked us to do it'.

'I wouldn't have asked you to do it for the world', I said. 'Do you remember the day when we all agreed to adopt Home Rule in this enterprise, and to earn all its privileges ? If you want to hand your privileges back to the sweeper I'm not going to say no, or to tell you not to hand them over. You should by this time be able to decide these things for yourselves'.

'But why did you go and do it yourself this morning ?' Satyen went on 'I'm ready to do it at any time. It was Kali Babu who altered our system and handed the job back to the sweeper without consulting us'.

'Then' I asked, 'why didn't you all complain to Kali Babu for doing any such thing ? Here is a root principle of our community that we should share the job of keeping our own house in order. It is for you to decide how best we are to do it.' 'In future', Satyen said, 'we will always empty the buckets.'

Yesterday Dhirananda Roy, Alu's brother arrived, and all



L. K. Elmhirst and Miss Green
among pupils and workers of Sriniketan

the boys initiated him into the arts of Home Rule. I pointed out to them that had any of us been on the job yesterday we would never have allowed one bucket to go unemptied and to overflow and that this episode in itself was a good argument for our ruling our own affairs.

The Rajah of Uttarpara came here yesterday with his body-guard and we showed him around.

It is 6.30 p.m. and I must be away to sleep.

First letter from R.T. to L.K.E.

Shilaida, Nadia.

March 31, 1922

DEAR ELMHIRST

Your letter has delighted me. Every day I am getting more and more envious of your Swaraj at Surul, especially when I hear of your hens contributing their dues to the Commonwealth. Plato had no place for poets in his Republic, I hope your Swaraj of *chashas* does not cultivate platonic ideals in its election of members. I am proud to be able to remind you of the fact that my poet's contribution reached you weeks earlier than that of the most conscientious and capable of your hens.

I do not know what has happened to that poem of mine which I had to copy twice over, please take that to be my petition of candidature for poet-laureateship of your Swaraj, if you have the good sense to acknowledge that the culture of the imagination is not altogether superfluous for the purpose of agriculture.

Please take it seriously when I say that my whole heart is with you in the great work you have started. I wish I were young enough to be able to join you and perform the meanest work, that can be done in your place, thus getting rid of that filmy web of respectability that shuts me off from intimate touch with Mother Dust. It is something unclean like prudery itself to have to ask a sweeper to serve that deity who is in charge of the primal cradle of life. I wonder if you fully realise how great is your mission and what a future it has before it. But the small beginning which you have made of this institution at a remote corner of the world carries in it a truth for which men

today are groping in bewilderment. It is the truth of Peace. Real peace comes from a wealth which is living, which has the blessing of Nature's direct touch, which is not machine made ; let us seek it humbly, coming down to the soil to deal with those forces of life which are beautiful and bounteous.

Please cable Mrs Straight to send her friend (Miss Gretchen Green) to us ; she will be of immense help to us. Let her start for India some time in October.

Yours affectionately
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Monday, April 10, 1922

A great storm blew up last night and has cooled things down a lot. I saw men hurrying out to the fields with their oxen, so at 6 a.m. cutting out my *chhota hazri* I hurried off to Santosh Mitra to encourage him to get his ploughs and bullocks to work.

Nothing was ready, neither ploughs, yokes, hitches nor bullocks, so Kasahara and I had to sweat away until at last three ploughs were at work. The soil is of such a kind that it sets as hard as concrete in the hot weather and can only be broken up after a heavy shower. I took a hand with the local one-handed plough, an antique weapon which does no turning over of the soil but drives a spike down into it to about five inches deep, like the spike of a harrow.

With poorly trained bullocks it was a difficult tool to handle. The labourers and local cultivators go round and round their plots on no special system, and the circling made control difficult at the turns. They also tended to hitch the plough to the yoke with a rope instead of running the draw-bar through the yoke, so that the bar performed little of its proper function in driving the spike into the ground.

I worked to get our iron plough into shape after that and delayed lunch till 12.30 for this purpose, and then went back to the workshop later till tea time.

The boys are working directly under the overseer all together now. Niteshwar's interest is confined solely to the hens. He

shirks all other duties and finds no interest in anything else. Having left for the Ashram one evening without leave he's for the time being C. B. (confined to barracks, as we used to say in the army) for a week.

Kalimohan was back again today, having bought forty maunds of rice at what seemed a very reasonable figure.

He is very much upset with Andrews for having allowed the Swami to interfere with the rail strike and to prolong it when the men were ready to return to work having got the concessions they were after. Andrews, he thinks should have spoken out against the Swami. The men are now desperate. At each station Andrews had talked to them, then the Swami came along just behind him and said 'This man is both an Englishman and a spy. Don't trust him.'

The poor railwaymen now have to grovel in front of one of the European senior staff. 'You are our father and our mother' they say. Back comes the answer 'By nature I cannot be the one and I have no inclination to be the other'.

The men have been completely misled, says Kalimohan, hence the desperate action of the wrecking of the Punjab Mail train.

Santosh Mitra has settled into his new house and is very happy there. The new bench with the help of twenty men was pushed through the window into the workshop and has cost us Rs. 75 only to put together.

For the first student house we have all sweated hard, pounding broken bricks into the foundations, and the students have made good progress since. We are still awaiting angle irons for the hen house. Kasahara and I have been very busy over what is termed the *lohar-ma*, (iron mother) or brooder for the chicks. The first of our eggs came from hens that were short of protein food and vitamins. This has meant weak germs and they will, if they hatch, turn into weak chicks. The hens are ravenous for green or for animal food.

Talked to Gour for half an hour from 11 p.m. after developing photos.

Wednesday, April 12, 1922

With Kasahara's help, we have I think invented quite an ingenious brooder for the incubator hatched chicks. I've experimented as a blacksmith with nail heads for rivets, with punch and drill for boring holes, as a tinsmith with blow torch and soldering irons, as a *dirzee* (tailor), with waterproof cloth and the fixing of hook attachments.

For the Minister Nawab's visit the boys, somewhat unwillingly tidied things up and prepared for a tea. He is the new Minister for Agriculture in the province of Bengal, so is regarded by our Swaraj enthusiasts 'just as a tool of the British Raj.'

He arrived with his staff, the Registrar of Cooperatives, the Superintending Engineer of the district, the District Collector, the Chairman of the District Board, the Deputy Director of Agriculture, Das Gupta with his secretary and the Deputy Director for Industries, Mr Hoogewerf.

All went round together. I stuck tight to the Minister. They tried to throw cold water on our poultry plans, the Collector criticised our cow plans the only subject he can speak on with any authority, but that poor, and otherwise they had no suggestions to make.

The Nawab said nothing all the time. Santosh Majumdar who saw him alone later, told me that he was really delighted. 'Here at last you are doing something and not just talking about doing something. I shall send all my men to see how you are getting along. This one enterprise has made my visit to Birbhum District worth while'. At last we packed them all into their cars and we followed them to Santiniketan.

Mr Hoogewerf, the Deputy Director for Industries was, after the Minister, much the best of the bunch. The District Board Chairman elected, who made his fortune in Calcutta recently and who lives in the middle of the District, was not impressive. The Deputy Director of Agriculture, a politician, and an ignorant blusterer, kept saying how much he would help us but how difficult he would find it to carry out his promises. We had an odd dinner all together at which the

Chairman of the District Board dropped quite a number of bricks.

At 11 p.m. Santosh Majumdar and I went in to talk over the day's results with the Poet. Everyone was very disappointed with our visitors except Mr Hoogewerf, the Collector, Blackwood, I.C.S. and the Nawab.

Andrews walked away with me afterwards and warned me confidentially that there was a party in the Ashram, which did not yet understand just what we were trying to do at Surul, and that somehow we must together prevent any serious breach occurring between the two institutions.

Saturday, April 22, 1922

(After the passing of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform Bill, Agriculture became a transferred subject and so from among the elected members of the Provincial Assembly the new Chief Minister could appoint his Minister for Agriculture. Unfortunately for Bengal the loss of Sabour, its only agricultural college, with a staff of men mostly trained in America, where the terms Professors of Agronomy and of Farm Management were well established early in the century, left the Province without its own centre for agriculture research and teaching. A Bengal Minister, his Deputy and his Director of Agriculture might all therefore be wanting in any practical knowledge at all of how to approach agricultural problems.)

I had been, subsequent to the Nawab's visit to Surul, invited to attend a meeting of the Government's Agricultural Advisory Committee at which the future of agricultural education in the Province of Bengal was to be discussed.

Should there be agricultural schools, both elementary and secondary in rural areas ? There were thrity members ready to discuss this question. Blackwood I.C.S. our District Collector from Suri, a former Provincial Director of Agriculture led off. 'I gather we are all agreed that such schools are to be established', he said.

Knowing no one in the room and being a guest visitor, I kept quiet, though I wanted to ask : "Why this decision ?"

In the discussion that followed Swann .C.S. and Secretary to the Government, and the senior Civil Servant present suddenly leant back and said : 'Elmhirst, what's your opinion?'

All my opinion, I said, goes against any such proposition, and from my own slight experience I would be dead against the establishing of such schools. They will be expensive to operate, and impractical, for they will set up a dual system in primary education and will not meet your basic need. (At that period there was much talk in England about establishing in rural elementary schools with 'a rural bias').

No one seemed to take any immediate notice of my remarks and a disorderly discussion went on for some time. There were no farmers present and no one from the Department of Education. All were amateurs. Then one elderly Englishman got up to say that India was not America and what worked in America obviously wouldn't work in India. 'But', I protested, 'there are sound principles of approach to the problem of elementary education as there are to the technical training of future farmers and such principles are applicable the world over, but there will be differences in the mode of application of course, country by country.'

As soon as the meeting was over, Swann with Evans came up and said, 'Neither of us has any hope for this scheme of the Nawab's'. Then Mitra took me aside and said 'As officials we dare not counter any plan put forward by the Nawab but you really voiced the sentiments that we could not express.'

I gathered afterwards that there was no attempt to bring the different departments concerned into consultation and that, each being jealous of the other, went its own sweet way. Health had no touch with Education, Cooperation with Agriculture, Agriculture with Irrigation, Education with Industries, often duplicating the spending of public funds, so limited anyhow and so precious.

Mitra and his English co-worker were, I thought, the best of the bunch. I put forward the general lines of our own plan. They clutched at it like drowning men.

The three Tagore brothers were sitting on their verandah, two of them painting and all at peace as I returned to Jarasanko and got out of my respectable clothes and socks. They wanted all the news and were bubbling over with dry and humorous comment. How was Kasahara getting on? Had 'Uncle' a new play or operetta to perform?

Back from Calcutta last night and this evening attended a talk by the Poet, full of his imaginative approach to the problems of relationship between truth and beauty as he conceived them. His argument went something like this:

'Beauty is one of the words we use in our attempt to convey our own personal relationship with and conception of the Infinite. In reverse, where the Infinite exhibits itself or expresses itself most vividly for us, we tend to use the word beauty. The force we call or term Nature, has through the evolutionary process been arriving at, and has reached quite often, a state or a level of perfection in achievement and for this again we use the word beauty. Apart from man himself we are perpetually in search of harmony, of rhythm or of equilibrium, each of which in its turn exhibits some power of beauty that brings us into touch or association with some aspect of the Infinite. In our continuous search for these manifestations lies man's hope for the world. Insofar as we find the existence of any one of these aspects in man, in ourselves, in myself, we may say that this is evidence of a Spirit, a '*Rash*' a Taste, a Flavour or Juice, in our own make-up which demonstrates the working of the Infinite in us towards our own further evolution, towards that harmony, rhythm or equilibrium to which in time we may also refer in terms of beauty.'

The discussion, which was all carried on in English, had been stimulated, said the Poet, by a question put to him one evening in Cambridge last summer, when Bertrand Russell took him, Goldie Lowes Dickinson of Kings College, Mrs Frances Cornford, poet and wife of Professor Francis Cornford, into the Fellows Garden of Trinity College.

'Not only was this a setting of enchantment in itself,' he

added, 'but for me it was the most brilliant conversation in English of which I ever had the chance to partake. I enjoyed myself exceedingly and I shall never forget that night. Yes, I can get on very well in England. But the West generally is not too difficult to fathom. We don't have to struggle to see the way your minds work. You find it much more difficult to reach out to us, and much easier to grasp the nature and working of the Chinese mind.'

'I disagree' commented Andrews. 'We may be primitive still in our outlook but our spiritual background and outlook is oriental, we come of a common Aryan stock. I find it much more easy to make depth of contact with an Indian and his thinking than with a Chinaman or a Japanese.'

'With the Japanese,' said Tagore, 'I found myself wondering sometimes whether they were not laughing a little at me up their sleeves all the time. They were so polite, but were they really very interested in ideas ?'

Sunday, April 23, 1922

Kasahara's house is coming along, so are the quarters for the servants, for the boys and for the hens.

But there's trouble with the goats and so we are getting rid of them. The boys were sufficiently upset with them that they shut them up for the night in Jatin Babu's living and sleeping room on the ground floor and so stank out the whole house.

Tonight old Buddha Sircar came round to call on us and to see what we were up to. He told me that Surul used to be regarded by people in Calcutta as a health resort until the railroad was brought into this garden in 1857 and the engine erecting sheds and the house for the engineer erected. Then 12000 mistris were employed in the workshops until 1863 when the whole plant was closed down. (The mistris brought with them from Calcutta a most virulent form of malaria, and *anopheles philippinensis* the local brand of mosquito has infected the whole neighbourhood with it ever since).

My new servant has arrived. Almost stone deaf but clean and decent.

Monday, June 19, 1922

Is our pace too fast ? Have we bitten off more than we can chew ? No letter from the U.S.A. since March 6th. Neither staff nor Poet ever seem to doubt or to fear whether we shall come through. Our hands have been put to the plough with a vengeance and there's no turning back. I believe the staff, as at present, could carry on, it is myself I doubt. There are views and perspectives which my best friends here cannot see, doors that are closed to them.

What is it that makes, of our friendships at Oxford and Cambridge something so close, so fine ? Is it that we lack as yet perspective of the world, experience of life ?

Rathi, Gora, Kalimohan and Santosh are the salt of the earth and among the best of my friends here, but when I think of my friends at Cambridge, although we had so much of 'all things in common' we carried none of that load of responsibility for others that we try to carry here.

The Poet himself is great in so many ways, and a good friend. In pursuit of a common aim, he puts up no barrier to the building up of a sacred bond of loyalty, yet all the time one has a feeling that others have his ear and that, in spite of himself, his fertile and poetic imagination can soar away on the wings of a new idea and create havoc with the careful day to day pursuit of a careful plan, soundly conceived. He has just suggested that it is time for Gora to leave Surul and to take up once again his duties at the school at Santiniketan.

Without Gora we are at this moment lost. Who has put this idea into his head ? If I had to leave tomorrow Gora could keep the ship on an even keel. The furrow is a lonely one.

I took a chill last night, hence the depression. Ploughing from 6 to 8, bandaged patients and tried out the new doctor till 11 p.m. and had a feeling from his arrival that he would never do for us.

As soon as I saw the way he treated the little Santal girl who caught her finger in the roller and nearly took the top right off, I realised that for him she was not a human being at all,

nor were the Moadpur farmers, just so many animals. I could see him driving them away with his rudeness and his rough handling. 'But why should I have to treat them at all?' he said to me. 'They are not labourers in your employ. Send them to the hospital.' When he said he was already married I knew he would never settle out here in the wilds.

Anxious this morning about the well. Without ample water there can be no development. The more we expand the more we use. Will malaria defeat us? Is our drainage system in the rainy season sufficient? Can we supervise construction students' gardens, workmen and still keep an eye on the best road of approach to the villages around us?

The boys come in to husk ground nuts for sowing whilst I told them stories of Curtis and his Reform Scheme and of Army life. Thank heaven our adaptation of Baden Powell's scouting to suit the village boys is going ahead, faster perhaps than it should, but there's no holding Kalimohan and Dhira.

Tuesday, June 20, 1922

The chill was worse than I thought, so they sent this morning for old Hari Babu the doctor at Santiniketan. But he could not be found and it was thought that, with the help of a bottle, he might be celebrating the coming of the rains.

Sir Charles (C. F. Andrews) upset all the plans up at the school by grabbing the car and dashing down here to tell me that his worse fears were now realised and that my trouble must be malaria. He seemed almost disappointed when he could discover none of the proper symptoms and I remain peculiarly resistant, as I was in Iraq and India before, to that fell disease.

After tea I felt well enough to scramble out onto the roof to watch the sunset. Then the Poet and Sir Charles arrived and started a lively debate upon the place Nature had provided for women. 'If it wasn't a part of women's nature to be a matchmaker in and out of season, how many men would trouble to marry?'

Henrik came up and gave me a massage this evening. He told me the Santals were not a little impressed at the medical treatment given to the little girl with the damaged finger.

Visitors climbed up to the roof to call on me, Niteshwar, Buddhadas, Satyen and Dhira, Kasahara, the Kanungo, and Upen the surveyor. 'You must train someone else to do the ploughing,' 'You mustn't work so hard,' 'You're at it morning noon and night.' It's good to be well again.

Tagore had published a letter in the Press begging for help towards a relief fund to be raised for the starving people in Russia. Maclagan, Governor of the Punjab sent Rs. 250, Sir Frank Sly, Governor of Central Provinces, sent money and enquiries as to how Dhira and Masoji were getting along as Scout leaders. He'd met them at the Quaker Training Camp. Sir Harcourt Butler, Governor of the U.P. sent a flowery letter 'anything to which your name is attached etc.' Lloyd, Governor of Bombay, wrote through his private secretary to enquire what other Governors were giving 'before the matter is laid before the Governor.' This gave some cause for amusement.

Marris, Governor of Assam, Willingdon the Viceroy and Lytton, Governor of Bengal, never troubled to answer.

Wednesday, June 21, 1922

Gora and Santosh Majumdar called me into the office to tell me that there was a Santali waiting outside asking for a loan. 'What for?' said I.

A girl from his village, near to Santiniketan, was living separated from her husband, he said, and had allowed and even encouraged the *Durwan* (watchman) of the Government Tannery Demonstration to flirt with her and yesterday, somewhere in our garden, to seduce her.

This had been witnessed by some of the other Santal workers who had already reported the matter in their respective villages. A council had been called immediately from the four communities and a fine had been levied on her own village of

Rs. 20. This would be distributed equally, in part as hush money, and in part as punishment.

If not paid the crime would be published abroad, a general gathering called and a much heavier punishment inflicted, and since the crime had been committed under our aegis, the gathering might forbid Santalis to work for us in the future.

This man had no ready money and, if we would extend the loan to him, he was ready to work off the debt.

If a child is born as a result the whole question is likely to crop up again. We decided to make the loan. The *Durwan* had already left for Calcutta and could not easily be brought to book. Anyhow the victim seems to have been more than willing.

Looking back it came to my mind that I had been surprised at seeing this man chatting and joking with one of the Santal girls. That is such a rare occurrence in his very strictly operated society that naturally it had caused surprise. No local community is so strict over its womenfolk and one never notices anything but the height of modest behaviour combined with a frankness and freedom of relationship between the sexes and a sharing together of so many domestic and agricultural labours.

One interesting characteristic of this primitive tribe is the aboriginal aspect of almost all of the men's faces and figures, squat, short, snub-nosed, low of forehead but with wiry and powerful bodies, and the attractiveness of their women in the regular and often very beautiful features of the women without any of the aboriginal characteristics that are so noticeable in the males. In bodily make-up too, the women have a perfection of form and proportion. When not celebrating full moon with dances that go on all night, they are hard and steady workers, wielding their *kodalis*, broad-faced mattocks, and loading and carrying baskets of earth for a full eight-hour day. Lithe and slim, with no trace ever of superfluous flesh or fat, they represent a perfection of female type. Their firm round breasts are always partially uncovered and only concealed by an easy and gentle gesture on the approach of any man of another species.

The carrying of quite heavy weights on the head, all day, as well as water vessels morning and evening from the well, gives them a stride, balance, and carriage of the hip which makes of all of them potential queens. To balance and swing along as they do with a load on the head means that the feet must be swung one in front of the other at each step, the big toe braced, and in this way the hip has to be swung across with each movement, in order to keep the balance. The bracing of the big toe not only pulls the hip around but gives an extra inch or two to the length of each stride and a gliding movement to the gait.

My amateur efforts with the little girl's damaged finger and the daily inspection and gentle treatment have apparently won the respect of the local Santal tribe. All her relatives come to watch and crowd around the door.

In spite of the holiday, the boys decided not to brave the tropical downpour. Gora and Kalimohan carried out the daily inspection and then left the boys to their own devices. Looking down to the verandah of No. 1, I could see a game of cards in progress. Cards are forbidden up at the Ashram, but here they are being challenged in so many directions to show a greater maturity that we have decided not to legislate.

We have discussed with them ways in which they might legitimately earn at the rate of two annas an hour towards their board which costs Rs. 15 (annas 240) a month, or 60 annas a week, roughly 8 annas a day. In the U.S.A. as students we could earn 15 annas or 30 cents an hour towards our board which cost just over 50 annas or \$ 1 a day, i.e. 100 cents.

We give them two hours a day for work on their plots, the produce from which they sell for their pocket money, and for the purchase of tools and books, and four hours a day of work on the farm at all kinds of jobs. They are to be paid by vouchers which are handed into the kitchen manager towards the purchase of food, at the beginning of each month.

In this way we hope they may begin to realise the actual value of their own labour in terms of cash and of food. Tuition they

will get free, either by scholarship where they are orphans or by fees from their parents or gurdians.

Rathi came down today for a long discussion of the subject of better quality building with less worry and bother. He suggested that we could contract with a Calcutta firm which would also manufacture the necessary bricks locally. As I had prophesied we lost heavily on trying to make bricks for ourselves with the help of the only local brickmakers there were.

On the farm our *dhaincha* (cow-pea) was sown too late to be very much good as a crop. Next year we must plan to get it sown immediately following the first decent shower of rain. It should already be twelve inches high and it is only six and few nodules will have had a chance to form. The 'locals' agree that our paddy seed bed is as good as, if not better than, any other seed bed in the neighbourhood, and that we are well ahead of them. With the little garden tractor we were able to work our fields more thoroughly and more quickly than they could. This tool should help us also with the struggle to get a second crop established.

After some doubt about a rust that attacked the *jower* (millet) crop, when it was only four inches high, the young plants have recovered and on the land where there is no water logging it is doing well. The boys' ground-nut crop is well up and flourishing but it was really planted too late.

Friday, June 23, 1922

Just as I was sitting down to lunch who should turn up by the lorry than Gurudev with Prasanta Mahalanobis. 'I had to show him just what was going on down here' said the Poet. Prasanta is the newly appointed secretary to the new Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan. 'But the whole country must be told of this and when the news gets around it will help us like anything. Write out a prospectus, let us put a column every month into *The Modern Review*' said Prasanta Babu, who was never short of ideas good and not so good. 'Can't you wait,' I suggested, 'till we've really done

something ? We've only just broken the ice so far.' I objected strongly to what I felt was too much of a surface approach. I couldn't believe that such publicity could be of any help to us at all and I was quite determined that we should not go into print about Surul till we were much further onto our feet. Prasanta cannot see how very far away we still are from our basic objectives and aims. The torrent of suggestion without penetration flowed on. 'Why not take fifty students right away ?' he said to Santosh Majumdar later on.

Last night we achieved our first sign of victory in the village of Moadpur. Twenty boys, with their parents, turned out to form the first Scout Troup. Dhira tried them out with a number of simple games and exercises but, as the parents has insisted, without drill. When he left the parents were trying out the games among themselves.

Our students all did overtime today in their attempt to earn some pocket money. They really worked hard at putting tar on to the roof of the hen house and at transplanting paddy.

June, 25, 1922

After settling the straight line for Gopal's garden I went up to Santiniketan to see Rathi and to get the bolts and nuts we needed. Sir Charles (the Poet's present nickname for Charlie Andrews) called in on us and hauled me off to talk to a Mr Sen just arrived from Lucknow. He'd brought with him a basket of Lucknow mangoes of special quality. 'Mangoes don't really agree with Sir Charles' said the Poet, 'so you and I will have to do justice to them. You should have a farmer's appetite.'

Andrews then took me to call on Mr Polak, who had in protest at the treatment of his Indian community gone to prison in South Africa. I felt I had rather misjudged Mr Polak after that deplorable Hardikar meeting in London the night before I left. He seemed quite a reasonable sort of fellow.

In the evening all four of them came down and in the process of showing them around I felt, perhaps for the first time that we'd really got something to show at last to illustrate the

basic principles of our approach, even though we know well enough that the thing that counts most is the thing that you can't either see or show, the driving force and positive attitude in boys and staff, the most vital thing of all. Though everything depends upon it, no casual visitors are going to discover whether or no the leaven is really 'in the lump.'

The boys took over the operation of their own kitchen today. They started by cutting down upon their consumption of milk and by turning away the staff. Motru has become a capitalist and is determined to cut down the expenses. Satyen being away he has engaged a boy to help him at a wage of 4 annas an hour. This may be all right for the moment, but when Satyen returns there will be no more of this kind of plutocracy.

Kasahara has been working like a Trojan on the run for the chickens and had half finished it by this evening.

June 30, 1922

A case of cholera has just been reported in Surul village. This can be the prelude to a serious outbreak. No precautions, says Kartik Sircar, have been taken except to call in what he calls 'a native doctor.' The young man died within twenty-four hours of being taken sick. I've just sent a note up to Dr Bracchio begging for a saline injection outfit.

Nepal Babu, who lived here for some months during the attempt to implement Gandhi's programme in the village of Surul, told me that he made a special effort to break down the barrier between the two main and most powerful families there. He used to send a boy from each faction together to the bazaar. 'We couldn't keep silence the whole way and so we got to know one another in spite of our parents,' said one of the boys. This boy has now laid out a garden under our supervision, but complains bitterly of the destruction caused by the monkeys.

Yesterday, at the Poet's request all the College girls came out for the first time to start a garden at the back of their hostel up at Santiniketan. Great excitement prevailed and a number

of fat blisters were earned. They'd never dug or chopped before. I ventured to supply Manju, the Poet's great-niece and our Subir's sister, with an axe, which she was determined to experiment with. 'What have you done?' I said as I saw her limping. 'I've hit my toe.' 'Go straight to the hospital and get it looked to and then go and report to Mrs Sen.' I was afraid the latter would forbid any further 'coolie activity.' Mrs Sen only heard of the accident after the bandaging was over.

In the middle of our struggles the sixty-two year old Poet arrived and insisted upon trying his hand with the axe. He told me he was determined to dig a trench in his own garden and to begin the daily burying of rubbish and manure.

Late in the afternoon the girls, with the help of crowbar and hammer, erected their own garden fence against the all-marauding goats. They worked well.

The same evening Gurudev presented me with a silk shirt of the simple Bengali pattern. 'I can't be outdone by Sir Charles,' he said. 'Sir Charles had recently had a present of two bright pink cotton shirts which he felt he could not aspire to himself, so he had palmed them off on me.'

The Santals are very particular about the orderly behaviour of their womenfolk. Two widows in the neighbouring village had dared to climb on the leaky roof of their cottage and had begun to replace the thatch. They had been outcasted as a consequence and came to Santosh Mitra in a most disturbed state. I had only two days ago offered Mrs Sham Maji an opportunity of driving the garden tractor, a chance she seemed very much to enjoy. Had I risked an outcasting for her?

Now and then someone comes to retail the gossip to me, more especially when anxieties have been aroused. The latest list, and what a list, includes the following: 'The students are disgruntled.' 'You are being drawn away too often to Santi-niketan by the staff.' 'There's too little sympathy and understanding between the Bengali staff and the students.' 'The Directors take no interest in the students.' 'The whole place will have to be sold up. It's on the rocks, look at the lavish

POET AND PLOWMAN

expenditure on roads, drains and fencing.' 'Surul has taken some of the best men away from the Ashram.' 'Santosh Majumdar is this, and that, and what-not.' 'The villagers are up in arms, because we have been acquiring their lands.' 'The source of money is drying up, if it has not already dried up altogether.'

July 26, 1922

Yesterday witnessed the expulsion from our school of Satyen and Subir, the voluntary withdrawal of Niteshwar, Sanat and Motru, an attempt to organise a strike among lesser staff and labourers, which came to nothing and the almost total nervous exhaustion of the Director himself. This day I travelled up to Calcutta with the Poet and, with him in the chair, delivered a talk on 'The Robbery of the Soil'¹ to the students of Calcutta University. Ramananda Babu, the Editor of *The Modern Review* monthly begged to have it for printing complete and without reduction in his magazine, with Gurudev's introductory remarks.

APPENDICES

I

As Chairman, it is my primary duty to introduce to you Professor Elmhirst, the lecturer of today's meeting. As my junior in years he has my affection. But deep in my heart I hold him in high regard. A time was when India saw a conflict between one race and another, one religion and another. During those medieval times of India's history saints like Ramananda broke through those barriers. They brought races and religions together and tried to bring about unity amongst Hindus and Muslims — so as to be able to deliver them out of the bounds of their narrowness. In Europe today we see the same spirit of conflict among nations. The countries there are torn by repeated wars. As a result, some of their men have started coming out into the wider world of humanity leaving behind the boundaries of nationhood and of caste and creed. By and by, we are bound to see a gradual expansion of such humanitarian work in the varied activities of men like Elmhirst. And, as we come to know him through his work we shall learn to give him the respect due to him of our own accord.

After obtaining his Tripos in History from Cambridge Mr Elmhirst had been to the United States to study Agriculture. I consider it necessary that I give you this background of his education. We do not wish nor expect that he should tell us something about the science of agriculture merely as an academic discipline. Nor is it the aim of today's lecture to deal with such eminently practical subjects as enriching the fertility of the soil or rotation of crops and so on. As a historian he must have studied the history of the human race in the wider perspective of man's relationship with the soil. We would like to hope that out of his study and reflection of this subject he will unfold to us his own ideas about the place that agriculture should occupy in the context of human life and civilisation.

It has been my earnest desire for long that we in this country should deal with the problems of agriculture in a big way. I had sent some of our young men abroad to study agriculture so that

on their return home they might tackle this problem and thus serve their motherland. During those days I had said in my article entitled *Swadeshi Samaj* that we have to reconstruct our national life with the village as the centre. To bring completeness of life to the village has been a dream of mine of long standing. That must be the reason why I shared this dream of mine with Mr Elmhirst when I met him for the first time in the States. I had told him then that if he could come out to India he would have no dearth of work to do and that he might be of help in bringing to the Indian village the kind of fulfilment that I had envisaged. He readily agreed to my proposal, and, young though he be, did not hesitate in the least to take up this work with a full sense of responsibility and dedication. The way he is going ahead with this work amongst the peasantry of a country strange to him—is a marvel to watch.

One of the highlights of our Indian tradition is the legend of King Janaka who is reputed to have combined his quest for the highest truth (Brahma) with his knowledge of agriculture. For this wonderful synthesis that he achieved in the days of yore between the heavenly and the earthly, he is still considered to be the ideal monarch. It is in such context of the highest human ideal that we must regard the art of agriculture. If we fail to do so, this noble pursuit loses all its dignity. We cannot deny the hard truth that by looking upon agriculture as a daily repetition of drudgery our peasants humiliate themselves and wear the shibboleth of slavery of their own accord. By so doing they offer themselves for sale to the wealthy who live on the fruits of their toil. In Europe, they speak about the dignity of labour. But a peasant who is only a vassal or slave can claim no dignity. When a man exhausts all his wits plying the loom or driving a plough, he has no surplus left from cultivating his higher or nobler traits of humanity. He puts his hand to the job—but only as a machine or automation—and that is not conducive to his development as a complete human being. There can be no dignity in slaving for a wage. Manual work mechanically performed stultifies the mind and blunts the intellect. That is why a peasant drudging in a field excites only pity or contempt. In-

tellectuals have always looked down upon them because they find the churls have no vision, that their eyes cannot travel beyond the four corners of their fields. The intellectuals have felt that mere act of existence cannot make life worth-living.

But when a kingly sage like Janaka puts his hand to the plough, there can be no question of stultification or enslavement of the mind. When the time comes for our thinkers and intellectuals to take agricultural activities under their responsibility, the schism that at present exists between the hand and the brain for a large section of our population, will vanish. It is my earnest desire that having that aim in mind we do not grudge rendering help and cooperation to the lecturer in reaching that goal. Pray do not look upon him as a stranger from a distance simply because he is a foreigner. As he has dedicated himself to the service of mankind, he is one of us, and there can be no humiliation in accepting what he has to give. If one could see the work that he has initiated in our villages by joining hands with the local peasants, one cannot but entertain the highest regard for his enterprise. I therefore commend him and his lecture today to your best attention.

II

At the outset of today's discourse the learned lecturer has said that the extent of what we take out of the produce of the soil to serve our needs is not commensurate with what we give back to it, and, to that extent, we are responsible for impoverishing the soil. In our traditional concept, the *Samsara* is like a wheel. Our existence in the *Samsara* moves in a circle, we say. The sources of energy which arise out of the soil and constitute our life force must somehow rotate back to its origin, or else, we do violence to the vital force itself. The waters of the rivers and seas evaporate to the upper reaches of the sky and accumulate there in the form of clouds—so to be able to come down where they started from in the form of rain. If the climatic cycle of nature is disturbed in its rotational course, the result is often seen as drought and famine and such other calamities. In the matter of foodcrops that we produce, what we take out of the soil we fail to give back to it. Or, in other words, we do not describe the full circle between the output and input. Thereby, the soil is progressively being ravaged and plundered. We do not know since when this process of imbalance has been going on. In the vegetable and animal kingdom however, the cyclic order of give and take have gone on unimpeded, the wheel has gone on moving in perfect evolutionary circles since the dawn of creation. The disturbing factor has been the race of homo sapiens. By creating his own world as a buffer, man has placed obstacles on the path of reciprocation between nature and himself, the points of contact between the two have become few and far between. He has forged with his own hands, as it were, a huge wall of brick and mortar to confirm his isolation and separateness from nature. I am ready to concede that being a creature who has to live by his wit, it is necessary and essential that man has around him all the ingredients and paraphernalia of his existence. Nevertheless, he cannot afford to forget that he may not be able to exist over an indefinite length of time if he repudiates the fundamental truth that it is the vital spark inhering in the soil

which has endowed him with life. Man's compact with mother earth can run a smooth course, if he gives back what he receives from her, if he returns to her those revitalizing elements which are her own gift. To deceive her is to delude ourselves. If her ledger-books show an enormous accumulation on the debit side over the years and ages, and the credit side has hardly any entry, it should be plain to see that the time is not far away when her offsprings will go completely bankrupt.

Our lecturer has told us about the rise of great civilisations and how they declined and fell without leaving any trace behind. With the growth of these civilisations, by and by populous cities had grown, and the soil which erstwhile provided food and clothing without getting any the poorer herself, became in time quite unable to meet in full the exorbitant demands that the city people made on her. It was in this manner that the civilisations declined and were no more. It is true the expansion of trade and commerce has brought a large number of benefits and facilities to the city people of our times. When the soil of a particular region goes barren, there is nothing to prevent the soil elsewhere from producing a bumper surplus. Although this might stave off problems relating to the supply of food over a length of time, neglect of the life-sustaining soil is bound to have an inevitable repercussion sometime somewhere.

In the same way as there is this cyclic rotation affecting our physical existence, we must not lose sight of the fact that in our mental existence too, we have to follow this principle of circular progression. We are as much the children of the soil as of the human society. If we fail to make commensurate returns for what society contributes to nurture our mind and spirit, then we shall only exploit, and, in time, exhaust what society give us. A lot of thinking, a lot of sacrifice and suffering have gone to the making of human society. If, at any time, the living current of such thinking and self-sacrifice gets bogged, if mental inertia makes us follow dead habits and outwork conventions, we shall only deceive ourselves and our society. Such a society becomes bankrupt in thoughts and ideas. By ceasing to be vital, it ceases to be a resort of living minds. The village has always been the

unit of our Indian Society. Our society has grown in the same proportion as our rural settlements have expanded. If our village societies cease to take initiative in imbibing new ideas on starting new enterprises, their strength will slowly but surely ebb away.

Our lecturer has drawn our attention to the fact that cartloads of paddy-straw find their way to the cities from the villages depriving the fields of their natural nutrient. Similarly, the city's refuse is wantonly allowed to go down the Ganga, instead of being returned to the soil where they rightfully belong.

Similarly, the constant pull that we feel towards the cities which seem to attract the best of our thoughts and activities, the village society is becoming mentally moribund to an alarming extent. Speaking of the villages that I know of personally, I may say they are absolutely appalling in their total joylessness. Gone without trace are *Jatra*, *Kathakata*, *Kirtan* and other aids to folk education and folk entertainment. Those who patronised these have either left the village, or their sense of values have undergone complete reorientation. The village folk are no more able to benefit from what knowledge we have acquired or amassed ; or rather, we are no more able to plough back our stored knowledge into the soil of their mind. Their mental life is no longer enlivened with music and ballads and tales. It is these plain and simple fares which constitute those organic elements with which to enrich their mind and heart. Without them life ceases to be worth-living. The sad anomaly is that our cities hardly make for social contacts in the real sense. Here, lanes and bye-lanes separate us and walls rear up their heads forbiddingly. In the city it is hardly ever possible to establish those simple and natural relations which should obtain amongst the members of a community. Such intercourse can take place only in the rural setting. But, then *bhadralogs* are finding it increasingly onerous to spend time in the villages. They complain that there one does not get food material in sufficient quantities, and, as far as food for the mind is concerned, the less said the better. They seem to overlook the fact that it is because they deserted their villages that the villages have now become a desert.

Nobody seems to go deep into the problems that the village faces today, and even if they do they are reluctant to formulate their findings in clear terms. The way to our survival does not lie only in our non-cooperating with the foreigner. In order to live we must co-exist with our rural brethren. Few amongst us know or realise the sad state of affairs that are allowed to flourish in the village. Some of the communities there indulge in atrocious travesties in the name of their ancient faiths and religions—a tragic fact which does not even bear talking about.

What should be the ways and means of our survival—is a question that Mr Elmhirst has raised. My question is about the same—I would also like to know how to be able to maintain our social health and so ensure our self-preservation. I would like you to consider one question in that connection : the village drunks are generally drawn from among the *Hadis*, *Doms*, *Muchis*, etc.—i.e. communities belonging to the lowest range of our village economy. Those belonging to the middle class would not touch country liquor. Even the imported stuff they can imbibe only occasionally. The reason why the poorer sections make a habit of drinking—is because they need it to fight exhaustion at the end of the day's hard physical labour. The rice they carry in cloth bundles when they start for the fields in the morning, makes for their midday meal—mixed liberally with water. At the day's end, their stomachs simply cry for food. They feel famished and exhausted in body and mind. What they need at the hour is plenty of wholesome food, which they cannot afford. They try to make up for the lack of it by drinking, three or four pice worth of rice beer which can at least fill them with a false sense of well-being for a time. They feel like lords and masters for a little while—and then go their several ways back to their hovel of a home. If such routine vitiates their habits and attitudes, we cannot very well blame them.

The village that I know of is clouded over in an atmosphere of utter gloom of despair. There the mind of men—as also their body—is denied their proper nourishment and cannot grow in health and strength. Unavoidably therefore, the people there indulge in sensationalism and anti-social activities. If there were

functions and festivals as of old and there was no dearth of simple joys of social contact, and provision existed for enriching the folk mind with entertainment and education, there would have been no problem of the village mind degenerating. It is frustration which drives them to intoxicants and other substitutes. Please do not delude yourselves with the hope that you can suppress this craving for mental and bodily stimulants, either by force or by pious moralising. The outward manifestations are but symptoms, the root of the malady lies deeper in the mind where the soul dies a slow death for want of proper nourishment. If we wish to resuscitate our moribund villages, we have to supply to them their basic need of food for the body and the mind.

So much for the villages ; we are not better off in the cities where our stimulants differ only superficially. Our urban aberrations stem out of our ignorance or refusal to recognise the misery and poverty of our country as a whole. Not having the wider perspective, we try to put our conscience to sleep by sensation-mongering and shouting slogans within our municipal limits. But, there cannot be any escape from our sense of frustration and growing discontent, as long as we are not able really and truly to stand by our brethren of the village, as long as we do not bring them the light of knowledge or dedicate ourselves whole-heartedly for their betterment, whatever the sacrifice. We take part in all kinds of agitational activities, address public meetings, gnash our teeth and stare angrily at everything— out of our desire to allay our sufferings arising out of our guilt consciousness. Some of us who can write poetry, may even go the extent of composing a few patriotic songs. And all this happens although we are not able to rid our villages of the vast mass of filth which is allowed to accumulate, although we cannot provide them with nourishing food for the healthy growth of their mind and body. That is probably the reason why the *Hadis* and *Doms* continue to find their solace in their pots of country liquor and we from our own brand of intoxicants.

But, such self-deception will not lead us anywhere. We have to pour our best gifts for the sake of the country. We must take

our place by the side of our countrymen. I know of a band of youngmen who took up village service under the urge of non-cooperation. As long as they could maintain contact with their headquarters in Calcutta, and the Congress Committees continued to have liaison with them the work also continued. Thereafter, it all came to an end.

I would like to ask these youngmen as to whether they were able really to enter into the lives of the *Hadis* and *Doms* they went out to serve ? Were they able to initiate long-term enterprises having regard to the everyday needs of the villages ? There is no sensationalism there. There is hardly any excitement in sustained constructive activity. No wonder they gave up after a time. Even conscience needs to be fed if our sense of duty is to remain active. If we are not able to provide this daily ration of quiet inspiration, what can our youngmen do except to delude themselves with the false notion of being heroes and martyrs for a cause ?

At the present time, we are imbibing three different kinds of intoxicants in the three social strata to which we severally belong : spirituous liquor plain and simple, the liquor that corrupts the mind and morals ; and finally—the liquor that puts conscience to sleep. There is a brand to suit every taste—that of the *Hadis* and *Doms* at the lower strata, of the more privileged middle class of the village society, and finally the educated gentry of our towns and cities. That this has happened it solely because each of these three limbs of our body-politic is languishing for the lack of its own proper nourishment.

The articles printed in appendix are speeches delivered by Rabindranath Tagore at the Rammohun Library : the first one, introducing L. K. Elmhirst before he delivered the lecture 'The Robbery of the Soil' ; the latter, at the conclusion of the series of lectures. The second article is translated by Sri Kshitish Roy from 'Abhibhasan', *Palliprakriti*.

NOTES

NOTES

Personal Reminiscences

Page

15 Tagore : Rabindranath Tagore, the Poet.

Sam Higginbottom : Samuel Higginbottom, the founder of the Naini Agricultural Institute, where Leonard Elmhirst worked for some months in 1917-18.

17 Andrews : Charles Freer Andrews. He made his home at Santiniketan where he taught for sometime ; but was obliged later to be away from Santiniketan for long spells to attend to urgent calls of his varied self-imposed tasks in the cause of the country he had chosen to serve. Whenever he could snatch himself away from his other work, he would return to Santiniketan and place himself at the disposal of his Gurudev (*the great or inspired teacher*), the Poet. The people of India gave him the title of 'Dinabandhu' (*the friend of the poor*) in recognition of his great concern for and selfless service to the cause of the lowly and the lost.

Willie Pearson : William W. Pearson, a young Englishman who had adopted India as his home and had completely identified himself with the life and activities not only of Santiniketan but also of the surrounding villages—an intimate association severed by his premature death in 1923 caused by an accident while travelling by train in Italy.

Rathi : Rathindranath Tagore, the elder son of the Poet. He was one of the first batch of five students with whom his father started his experimental school at Santiniketan. He took the B.Sc. degree in Agriculture from Urbana, Illinois. He was one of the first Joint General Secretaries of the Visva-Bharati Society and the first Vice-Chancellor of the institution when it was incorporated in 1951 as a Central University. He accompanied the Poet in many of his travels abroad performing secretarial duties. He was an able administrator and was endowed with a rich literary and artistic talent.

Santosh Majumdar : Santoshchandra Majumdar, son of Srishchandra Majumdar who was a close friend of the Poet. He was also one of the first batch of five students of the 'Poet's School' at Santiniketan. A graduate in Agriculture of Urbana, he on his return from the States joined his *alma mater* to help the Poet in his work and made valuable contribution towards implementing the varied programme that the Poet had for his institution.

Kalimohan Ghosh : He was the first to help the Poet in carrying out his plan of rural reconstruction in his ancestral estate. In the words of the Poet : 'the responsibility of the work I took upon my shoulders, in the teeth of opposition of the educated gentry, was rendered easy of fulfilment by the fact of having Kalimohan at my side. We spent many hours together discussing the possibilities

of rural reconstruction. I found in him the makings of a true social worker and without him my task would have been rendered very difficult indeed'. Later, he joined the school as a teacher and was sent by the Poet to England to gather knowledge about the various methods of primary education and adult literacy work. With the starting of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan, he stepped forward to take up once again the duty of service to the humble and poor village folk in a spirit of selfless dedication.

Gourgopal Ghosh (Gora) : He was a student of Santiniketan in its early years. A footballer of repute, he donned colours for the famous Mohun Bagan Club of Calcutta. After his graduation from the Scottish Church College, he joined Santiniketan as a teacher of Mathematics. He was closely associated with the work at Sriniketan in various capacities. He served the Visva-Bharati till the last day of his life.

18 Boroma : Hemlata Tagore, wife of the Poet's nephew, Dwipendranath Tagore.

19 Gandhi : Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, usually referred to by Indians as 'Mahatmaji' (*one with a great soul*) or 'Mahatma Gandhi'. His long association with Santiniketan began in 1914, when, accepting an invitation from Rabindranath Tagore, he on his return from South Africa came with the students of his Phoenix School to Santiniketan and made it his home for a time. Though his pre-occupations with active politics did not permit him to visit Santiniketan frequently, Gandhiji never lost touch with the institution and helped it most generously by raising funds at a time when Visva-Bharati was facing a grave crisis. He had a deep regard for the Poet, whom he called 'Gurudev', and the Poet too held Mahatma Gandhi in great esteem.

22 Shotyen Bose : Satyen Bose— a youngman, who on the advice of the Poet left a temporary job at the Santiniketan library to join the first batch of students at Surul (Sriniketan). Later on, he became a well-known journalist.

23 General Dyer : General Dyer earned notoriety as being the person directly responsible for the Jalianwalabag massacre. The Poet was appalled by 'the enormity of the measures taken' and relinquished his Knighthood as a mark of protest.

Subir : Subirendranath Tagore, eldest son of Surendranath Tagore and grandson of the Poet's second brother, Satyendranath Tagore. He was one of the first batch of students of the institute at Surul (Sriniketan). He later went abroad and on his return to India, joined an Insurance Company, which had been sponsored by his father.

Jnanadanandini Devi : Wife of Satyendranath Tagore, who was the first Indian to join the Indian Civil Service.

25 Surendranath Tagore : Son of Satyendranath Tagore, he was a favou-

rite nephew of the Poet. He had rich literary talents and rendered into English some of the writings of the Poet.

Alu Roy : Sacchidananda Roy, an ex-student of Santiniketan, who served the Visva-Bharati in different capacities till his death.

- 27 Dhirananda Roy : An ex-student of Santiniketan, he was a good sportsman, an able administrator and a keen social worker. He was associated with the work of rural reconstruction at Surul in early days. After sometime he left Visva-Bharati service and accepted several assignments in the neighbouring town of Bolpur. He was manager of a bank and became the President of the Bolpur Union Board. Later, he returned once again to his *alma mater* to become ultimately the Director of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan.

Masoji : V. S. Masoji— an ex-student of Kala-Bhavana, Department of Art & Crafts. After successfully completing the course of study prescribed there, he joined Kala-Bhavana as a teacher of art and served the institution for a number of years.

- 28 Jagadananda Babu : Jagadananda Roy, one of the selfless band of teachers of Santiniketan. An ideal teacher, he served the institution with dedicated zeal till the last day of his life. The books on scientific topics that he wrote for the children are remarkable for the lucid way of their presentation and bear ample testimony to his deep knowledge of diverse branches of science.

Lionel Curtis : Author of *Dyarchy for India*.

- 29 Mrs. Straight : Dorothy Straight, who later married Leonard K. Elmhirst. It was chiefly due to her munificence that the work at Sriniketan could be started and carried on over the years.
- 30 Miss Gretchen Green : An American lady, who joined Sriniketan as a worker and was instrumental in setting up a Village Health Centre and Clinic at Surul.

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- 51 Gertrude Emerson : A correspondent for *Asia* magazine in India, she later married the Indian scientist, Dr. Boshi(swar) Sen.

Willard Straight : Husband of Dorothy Straight.

- 52 Bay : Dr. Bay, an industrial Chemist.
- 54 Mr. Ghosh : An economist and scholar in German.
- 55 Dwipendranath Tagore : Eldest son of Dwijendranath Tagore, eldest brother of the Poet. Known as 'Dipu Babu', he was a Trustee of the Santiniketan Trust and the Treasurer of the institution.
- 56 Aurobindo Bose : A nephew of Sir Jagadishchandra Bose, Aurobindomohan Bose was a student at Santiniketan during the early years

of the institution. He has now settled down at Switzerland. He has translated into English some of the poems of Rabindranath, which have been published under the titles, *A Flight of Swans* and *Later Poems of Rabindranath Tagore*.

- 57 Sir Jagadish Bose : Jagadishchandra Bose, eminent Indian scientist and a close friend of the Poet. Founder of the Bose Institute in Calcutta, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1920 in recognition of his significant contribution to science.

- 62 Sir P. C. Roy : Prafullachandra Roy, noted Indian scientist, a dedicated teacher of Chemistry, a great humanist and patriot.

B. N. Seal : Dr. Brojendranath Seal, modern India's foremost scholar and philosopher. He presided over the formal inauguration of the Visva-Bharati in December 1921.

Dr. Liberty Hyde Bailey : An American scientist specialising in Botany and Horticulture.

Sir Michael Sadler : Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, he was the Chairman of the Calcutta University Commission (1917-18).

Dwijendranath Tagore : The eldest brother of the Poet. He was a philosopher and the most important of his contributions has been a comparative study of the philosophy of Kant and Vedanta. His *Swapnaprayan*, an allegorical poem, has remained a classic in Bengali literature. A rare personality, he settled at Santiniketan and spent his last days there.

Maharshi : Debendranath Tagore, father of the Poet. A leader of the Brahmo Samaj, he came to be known as 'Maharshi' (*the great sage*) because he dedicated his life to the quest of One Supreme Being. Visva-Bharati has grown out of the Santiniketan Asrama founded by the Maharshi. The site of the Asrama was originally a deserted spot in the middle of an open country. The Maharshi came here on one of his journeys and was so attracted by the place that he acquired the plot of land and built a house— which he named 'Santiniketan' (the Abode of Peace), and a Mandir on it. Later, he dedicated the Asrama which came to be known as Santiniketan by a Deed Trust to the people so that seekers after truth might come and meditate in peace and seclusion, free from all antagonism of creed and sect.

- 63 Chakravarty : Akhil Chakravarty, an engineer trained in America, who was commissioned to sink tubewells at the institution. The Poet made the occasion memorable by composing a song viz. 'Eso eso he trishnar jal' (tr. Pitiless darts of fire strike a thirst pang in the heart of the sky).

- 64 Biswanath : Biswanath Mukherji, an alumnus and a good sportsman, who after completion of his studies joined his *alma mater* as a teacher and served the institution till his retirement.

Tan Seyn : A Burmese student of Kala-Bhavana, the Department of Art and Crafts.

Prof. Sylvan Levi : A celebrated French Indologist, who accepting an invitation from the Poet, came to Santiniketan. The academic activities of the Visva-Bharati, after its formal inauguration in December 1921, started with the lectures of Professor Levi, the first of a succession of visiting professors who were all eminent scholars of international repute.

Madame Levi : Wife of Prof. Sylvan Levi.

66 Santosh Mitra : Santoshchandra Mitra. He was a teacher of art at Santiniketan ; but later on, took up duties as Farm Manager at Surul. He served the institution in various capacities with singular devotion. Endowed with considerable histrionic ability, he took part in most of the dramatic performances put up by the Visva-Bharati.

Dinu : Dinendranath Tagore, son of Dwipendranath Tagore. A grand nephew of the Poet, he was a distinguished musician and 'the Custodian' of Rabindranath's songs. Notations by Dinendranath helped to preserve a large number of Tagore songs in their correct tunes. He was in charge of the Music Section at Santiniketan and coached the students for the different functions and festivals as also for dramatic performances.

71 Mr. Cheap : John Cheap of East India Company. Resident at Surul, he was a well-known indigo-planter.

73 Asit Halder : Asitkumar Halder, a reputed artist who was one of the disciples of Abanindranath Tagore, the Maestro. He joined Santiniketan as a teacher of art and, later on, became the Principal of the Art School at Lucknow.

Atul Chauru : Names of two students, Atul and Chauru, who were then at Santiniketan.

74 Nitu : Nitindranath Ganguli, son of the Poet's youngest of the three daughters, Mira Devi. He died prematurely in Germany.

Nagen Ganguli : Nagendranath Ganguli. He married the Poet's youngest daughter, Mira Devi.

76 Rajalakshman Rao : A student from Mysore, who joined the work at Surul (Sriniketan).

78 Santosh Bose : Santoshbihari Bose, an agricultural scientist, who was one of the early band of workers of Sriniketan. While writing about his book on agriculture, the Poet paid a glowing tribute to the author.

81 Abanindranath Tagore : A nephew of the Poet, he was the youngest and the most celebrated of the three artist brothers. Abanindranath was a versatile genius. A Master artist, he was the founder of a new art movement in India and the reviver of Indian tradition in art. He was also a great art teacher and his pupils included among others Nandalal Bose, Asitkumar Halder, Mukul Dey, Surendranath Kar, Kshitindranath Majumdar, Surendranath

Ganguli, Debiprasad Raychaudhuri, Bireswar Sen and S. Venkatappa. A creative writer of rare distinction, he was also an accomplished actor. He took delight in fashioning discarded and apparently useless objects into things of beauty. After the Poet's death in August 1941, he came forward in spite of his failing health and held the reins of the Visva-Bharati as its Acharya (President). He delivered the Bageshwari Lectures at the Calcutta University.

Gaganendranath : Gaganendranath Tagore. Eldest brother of Abanindranath and an artist of great individuality and distinction. He also appeared in different roles of Rabindranath's plays and acquitted himself most creditably.

- 82 Samarendranath : Samarendranath Tagore, brother of Gaganendranath and Abanindranath. He was also an exceptionally talented artist but was overshadowed by his more renowned brothers.

Prince Dwarkanath Tagore : Grandfather of the Poet.

- 84 Pratima Devi : Wife of Rathindranath Tagore. She was an artist and was, in the early years of the Visva-Bharati, in charge of choreography in the Poet's dramas staged by the students and teachers of the institution.

Mrs. Van Egen : A Dutch lady. She was interested in music and spent sometime at Santiniketan participating in the activities of the institution.

- 91 Mira Ganguli : Youngest of the three daughters of the Poet.

Buri : Nandita, daughter of Mira Devi (Ganguli). She was a good dancer and could recite well. She married Krishna R. Kripalani, M.P., who was then a teacher at Santiniketan and later on, became the Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi.

- 92 Nandalal Bose : The famous creative artist. One of the most renowned disciples of Abanindranath Tagore, he was the Principal of Santiniketan Kala-Bhavana for nearly thirty years and it was under his inspiring guidance that Kala-Bhavana came to occupy a unique position as a Centre of Indian Art. An idealist, he served the Visva-Bharati with unflinching devotion for the realisation of the educational ideals which the Poet laid down for his institution. Frescos done by him and his pupils adorn the walls of many buildings at Santiniketan and Sriniketan.

- 96 Lord Sinha : Lord Satyendraprasanna Sinha, first Baron of Raipur. An eminent barrister, he has been the only Indian to be raised to the peerage. He was also the first Indian Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and the first Indian Governor of a Province.

- 100 Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's daughter : Padmaja Naidu, who later became the Governor of West Bengal and ex-officio Rector of the Visva-Bharati.

Kasahara : Kim-Taro Kasahara, a Japanese carpenter-gardener, who came to work at Santiniketan.

- 104 Dr. Brachio : He was at that time the Civil Surgeon at Suri, the district headquarters.
- 108 Raja of Pithapuram : He was extremely devoted to the Brahmo Samaj and an ardent admirer of the Poet. He donated a handsome amount for the library building at Santiniketan. Pithapuram is in Andhra.
- 109 Erskine family : The Erskines of Illambazar, which is a few miles away from Bolpur, were engaged in textile business.
- 110 Frin : Frinton Rai, a student from Assam who was one of the first batch of trainees at the institute at Surul (Sriniketan).
- 111 Buddhadas : A student from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), he was one of the first batch of trainees at the institute at Surul (Sriniketan).
- 112 Upen Babu : Upendranath Bose, Overseer and Surveyor.
- 113 Matru : Kulaprasad Sen. He was one of the first batch of students of the institute at Surul (Sriniketan). He joined the Postal service and rose to be the Postmaster General of West Bengal. Presently, he is a Trustee of the Santiniketan Trust.

Kshitimohan : Kshitimohan Sen. An eminent scholar in Sanskrit and works of the medieval Sants of India, he was one of the stalwarts who lent active help and support to the Poet in his educational experiments at Santiniketan. It was he who with Pandit Vidhusekhar Sastri extended a warm and sincere co-operation to the Poet in putting into shape his idea of establishing at Santiniketan a truly international centre of learning 'where the world makes its home in a single nest'. He was for a long number of years the Principal of Vidya-Bhavana (Department of Research Studies) at the Visva-Bharati. An outstanding teacher and a brilliant conversationalist, he contributed richly to the life at Santiniketan. He was appointed *ad interim* Vice-Chancellor of the Visva-Bharati in 1953 following the resignation of Rathindranath Tagore.

- 116 Pulin Das : A revolutionary of Bengal, who was deported by the British rulers to the Andamans with a long prison sentence.
- 117 Shaukat Ali : Maulana Shaukat Ali, who along with his brother Maulana Mohammed Ali, led the Khilafat movement in India.
- 123 Motru's mother : Snehalata Sen. She was for sometime in charge of the girls' boarding at Santiniketan.

Niteshwar Nag : Brother of Bireswar Nag— a worker at Santiniketan, he was one of the trainees to join the institute at Sriniketan.

- 124 Munti : S. N. Ghosh. He joined the institute at Surul (Sriniketan) as a trainee.
- 125 Gopal : Gopalchandra Roy, a trainee, who specialised in poultry farming.

- 127 Manju : Manjusri Tagore, elder daughter of Surendranath Tagore. She was married to Prof. K. P. Chattopadhyaya of the Calcutta University.

Nepal Babu : Nepalchandra Ray, one of the selfless band of teachers of Santiniketan. An idealist, he served the institution with dedicated zeal for a long number of years.

- 132 Minu : Malati Sen, daughter of Snehalata Sen. She is an ex-student of Santiniketan and married Nabakrushna Chaudhury, who was for sometime the Chief Minister of Orissa. Both of them have now joined the Sarvodaya movement under the leadership of Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

Miss Stella Kramrisch : An Austrian by birth, she is a renowned scholar, critic and teacher of Indian art. In the early twenties, she taught History of Art at Santiniketan. Later, Prof. Kramrisch joined the Calcutta University and helped in organising History of Art as a special subject of study. She also delivered lectures on Indian Art at Oxford and London Universities. She is the author of a large number of important and learned publications on Indian art.

- 133 Kartik Sarkar : Zemindar of Surul village.

- 135 Prabhat Mookerji : Prabhatkumar Mukherji, the biographer of the Poet. He was a teacher and the librarian at Santiniketan and retired after rendering about forty years of service to the institution.

- 138 Suren Kar : Surendranath Kar, a disciple of Abanindranath, joined Santiniketan as an art teacher. He was a talented artist ; but left his brush and took to architecture. He designed most of the buildings of the Visva-Bharati which were put up during his time including the Uttarayana group of buildings, Vichitra and Cheena-Bhavana. He earned all-India reputation as an architect. He was for sometime the Principal of Kala-Bhavana and the Secretary of Santiniketan. He served the institution for nearly forty years with singular devotion.

- 141 Morris : Hirjibhai Pestonji Morriswalla. He was a teacher at Santiniketan.

- 148 Minister Nawab : Nawab K. G. M. Farouqui, the then Minister of Agriculture, Bengal.

- 151 Goldie Lowes Dickinson : A teacher at Kings College, Cambridge, and author of *John Chinaman*, which was reviewed by the Poet.

- 152 Buddha Sarkar : An old member of the local zemindar family.

- 154 Baden Powell : Lord Baden Powell, founder of the scouting movement.

Hari Babu : Dr. Haricharan Mukherji, visiting physician from Bolpur.

- 158 Prasanta Mahalanobis : Prof. Prasantachandra Mahalanobis, the eminent Indian scientist who earned international recognition for his contribution to Statistics. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and the founder of the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta. He was actively connected with the drawing up of the first Five-Year Plan for India. A great admirer of the Poet, he was closely associated with the institution for many years. He was one of the first Joint General Secretaries of the Visva-Bharati Society.
- 159 Mr. Sen : Atulprasad Sen, a renowned Bengali poet and composer of songs. He was a barrister practising at Lucknow. The Poet had a deep and affectionate regard for him.
- 162 Sanat : A student from Benaras (Varanasi), who joined the institute at Surul (Sriniketan).
- Ramananda Babu : Ramananda Chatterji, Founder-Editor of *Prabasi* and *The Modern Review*, two outstanding monthly magazines published from Calcutta. He had a close association with the Poet and his institution.

Errata

Page	Line	for	read
42	31	statesman	statesmen
47	35	backing	baking
62	35	statred	started
101	35	sitting	setting
104	11	persuable	persuade
105	27	soild	solid
108	30	ou	you
108	34	must	I must
114	23	Peot's	Poet's
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124	37	ready o	ready to
149	30	thrity	thirty
150	9-10	establishing in rural	establishing rural
155	1	massage	message
157	13	thd	the
173	25	it	is



This book contains almost a day-to-day chronicle of what Elmhirst saw, felt and did at Santiniketan and Surul (Sriniketan) during the first nine months after he joined the institution. Informal, candid and uninhibited, these daily jottings are an invaluable record of a period crucial to the growth of Sriniketan and of significant interest for the history of the Visva-Bharati. A fascinating human document, it is as interesting as it is revealing. To his English sense of humour, Elmhirst had added the Indian ear for gossip. He seemed to have enjoyed listening to whatever he heard or overheard and duly noted it down. Some of the observations recorded in the diary should be of interest to students of Indian sociology. The most significant entries are those which relate how the foundations were laid, almost from scratch, of what later became famous as Sriniketan. These entries based on first-hand knowledge are an authentic testimony to Rabindranath's passionate concern with the imperative need of resuscitating the dying agricultural and village economy of his land. The book has been enriched by the inclusion of some speeches on different aspects of rural reconstruction delivered by Rabindranath and an address by Elmhirst.



POET AND PLOWMAN

L. K. Chukhrist